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THE HEART OF UNCLE TERRY

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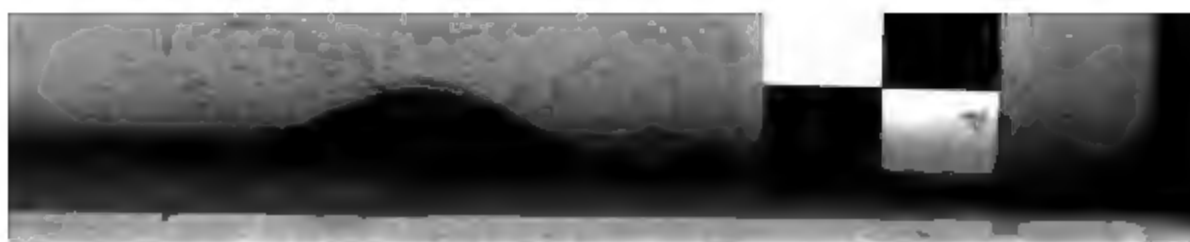
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"SO THAT'S UNCLE TERRY'S CABIN, IS IT?" — *Page 9.*

THE HEART OF UNCLE TERRY

BY

CHARLES CLARK MUNN

AUTHOR OF "POCKET ISLAND," "UNCLE TERRY," "ROCKHAVEN,"
"THE HERMIT," "THE GIRL FROM TIM'S PLACE," "MYRTLE
BALDWIN," "BOYHOOD DAYS ON THE FARM,"
"THE CASTLE BUILDERS"

ILLUSTRATED BY W. L. HOWES

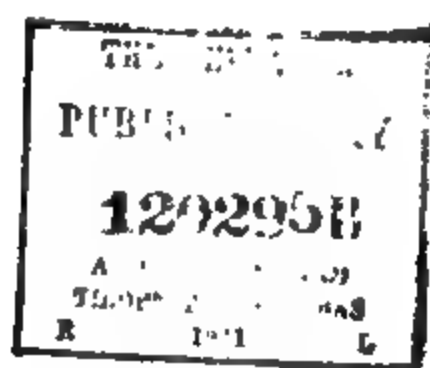


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1915

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The Heart of Uncle Terry

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TO MY FRIENDS

From the days of belief in childhood's myths until Hope sees only the beacon faintly shining upon the Promised Land, life is one continuous succession of illusions. Rose-tinted at first, then shading slowly but surely into the darker hues of the rainbow. More than blest are we that the All-Wise One has thus tinted them for us. Ever welcome are the many souls He has endowed with true optimism, forever to see life with a silver lining to all clouds, to hear the birds of joy ever singing, and to see the flowers of happiness ever blooming.

I have met and come to love many of these optimists. They are like June days on the tablets of my memory. I owe them more than I can ever repay in renewed courage, faith, and hope. I recall them one by one, after many years, and always as so many blessings that have come to me; charming as youthful illusions, and sweet as distant bells at eventide. And so in gratitude and loving remembrance, I dedicate this book to them.

—CHARLES CLARK MUNN.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE HEART OF UNCLE TERRY

CHAPTER I

“**S**O that's Uncle Terry's cabin, is it?” queried a stalwart young man in grey corduroy, as he stepped out of the canoe, stretched himself, and glanced across a half-acre of green-sward to a large, square log cabin with rustic piazza, almost hidden by scarlet and brown vines. “And so the old fellow lit out after two years' hermit life, did he?”

“Yes, 'n' took his wife with him,” responded Levi, Vance Harper's guide, beginning to unload the canoe.

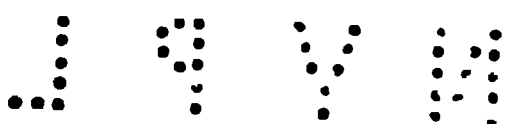
“Well, you wouldn't expect he'd leave her behind,” laughed Vance, then looking down the long narrow lake, added, “Where's Pro and Jean? They are not in sight.”

“Oh, I guess they've hooked onto a big trout that's givin' 'em a fight,” answered Levi. “They'll be 'long soon. You might's well follow this brook

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up through the ravine while I'm gittin' supper started. You'll be 'most sartin to git a few birds."

With that Vance picked up his gun, slipped two shells in, and taking another survey of the cabin, with its open plot of greensward in front and its neighboring mountains to the northward, strode up to the ravine at the foot of its westward slope. He had scarce entered when, as is usual with the tame breed of Maine partridges, he heard a "Peep, peep," and two of them walked slowly up the narrow path ahead of him. It wasn't a sportsman's act, but time was short, and without a moment's hesitation, Vance fired, killing one, and as the other rose he let fly the other barrel, to see it pitch into a shallow canyon or rock-filled gully, some four rods up the mountain-side. To find that second partridge was his next thought, so dropping his gun beside the dead bird, he scrambled up to where he had seen the other drop. A feather or two, together with rotten leaves and mould scratched out from beneath a flat rock bridging a gravel-filled crevasse, showed where his wounded bird had hidden, and reaching in, Vance soon secured his game. And just then, while he still knelt, a single ray from the sinking sun found its way through the spruce growth to flash a sparkling glint from an oblong bit of



THE HEART OF UNCLE TERRY 11

vivid green close beside one knee! On the instant, Vance picked it up to find a two-inch-long, hexagonal prism, each face of which flashed the sun's rays like a well-cut emerald! So curious now that he almost forgot both birds and further shooting, he began digging into the bed of mould-covered gravel, unearthing five more of the curious gems, two of darker green, two of delicate purple, and one of amethystine shade. Each was translucent as the finest glass; and each flashed the sun's rays with wondrous beauty. For a full ten minutes he kept turning first one, then another of the gems in his rift of sunlight. Then as it vanished, he thought of the time, picked up his second bird, halted at the foot of the little canyon to stuff the other into his shooting-jacket and picked up his gun. And then, so compelling is curiosity, and with the setting sun now shining full upon him, Vance took the six gems from his pocket and held them up one by one to see them flash.

Not two rods away, and from behind a bush-hidden boulder, two black, sinister eyes also watched the flashing gems!

When Vance returned to the cabin he found the Professor holding aloft a monster square-tail trout suspended from a small pocket-scale.

"Just five pounds, four ounces," he announced

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gleefully as Vance came up. "Who says I can't catch big fish?"

"Not I," rejoined Vance, smiling and tossing his brace of birds on the cabin piazza. "You are certainly high-line so far on this trip, and we will have him broiled for supper." He also noticed that the two guides had cleaned out and swept the cabin and pitched a tent in front on the green-sward, and that a fire had been started in the cabin's fireplace, and a pail of potatoes hung from the crane above the flames.

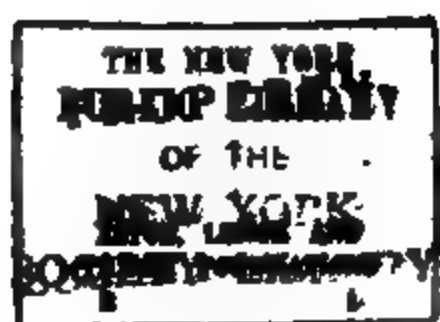
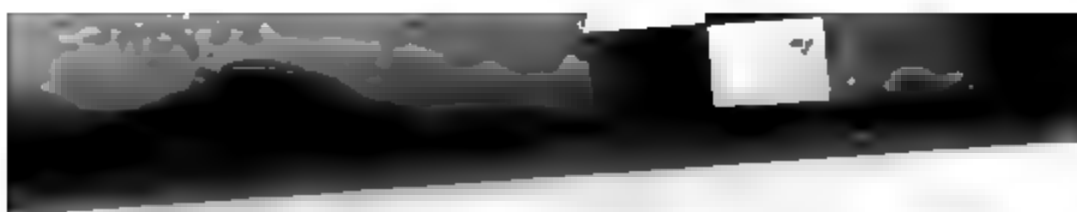
"Let's clean your fish," Vance next suggested, "while our guides are away cutting boughs, I presume, or else after wood. It will help supper along just so much, and I'm hungry. Besides, I've got something to show you."

And then, self-helpful as always, and never disdaining such work, Vance seized the big fish by its tail and hastened away to the lake shore, followed by his comrade. When quite hidden from the cabin, he dropped the trout and drew from his pocket the sparkling crystals. "What are those, old boy?" he demanded.

The Professor, whose lifelong hobby had been the study of rocks and minerals, snatched the big green one from the outstretched hand of Vance and held it up to the setting sun.



VANCE HELD THEM UP ONE BY ONE TO SEE THEM FLASH -Page 11.



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"A tourmaline," he exclaimed with an ecstatic look, "and one of the finest I ever saw! Why, that gem is worth a hundred dollars when cut." Then, as he held the rest up one by one to the sunset light, ejaculations followed fast.

"But where did you find them?" he queried finally. "In the bed of the brook you followed up?"

"No," rejoined Vance more calmly, and half disbelieving what the Professor had asserted. "I found 'em in a pocket of sand and gravel up in a gully." Then he explained the circumstances.

"Good, good," the Professor kept exclaiming, as the story was told. "It's just such pockets where tourmalines are always found in any quantity. One pocket may mean a dozen in this gully. I suppose you didn't notice the character of the rocks alongside? If it is lapidolite, grey and purple predominating, with less of feldspar mixed with mica, your fortune is found." And then, interrupting this sudden vision of wealth, came a "Hello" from Levi. It brought the two dreamers back to earth and the trout prone upon the gravel at their feet. That was speedily prepared for broiling by Vance's hunting-knife, and ten minutes later, these two dazed men were watching it

minutes later, what a feast was enjoyed by four hungry men at a banquet board of planks, with two camp candles to light that big trout, split, larded with butter and broiled to a turn, was first to vary the menu. Always in camp, came the cob pipes and his mate enjoying them beside the fire, and Levi and Jean smoking as they washed and wiped the dishes.

Conversation, with the usual camp stories, followed that evening, for both Vance and L. were with minds on their marvelous catches, and not daring even to hint of it to the other. They did not even half listen to what L. had to tell. Finally, Vance, anxious to be alone with Professor, thought of a ruse.

"I will take a stroll down to our canoes, for I need some fresh air before turning in," he said, and escaped.

The moon, low in the west, outlined a narrow path down the lake. A lone fisherman

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the low mountain. But neither this crisp September evening, the call of the wild birds, nor the eerie moonlight in emulation of the camp fire-light at their back was now noticed by these fortune-excited comrades, even when seated beside and leaning against an overturned canoe.

"Suppose we do find a tourmaline mine," Vance began, when seated, "it won't do us much good so far as I can see. This Uncle Terry still owns the mountain, or if not, a more grasping man may. If we come upon a few hundred gems to-morrow as I hope, we are still liable to the law if found out. We could, of course, play shady and sell them, but then again that would waken keen curiosity and comment. All in all, secrets of that kind are hard to keep."

"Why not buy this quarter-section, including the mountain, on as easy terms as possible?" suggested the Professor. "That is, if we find what we hope to-morrow."

"Well," replied Vance, smiling, "if it is worth to-day what I guess, I could just about buy this cabin and open plot in front, and that's all. I've about five hundred in a savings bank. A motor-boat I could possibly sell for a thousand and the two-thousand annuity left me by father, as you know, which is paid in monthly instal-

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ments by a trustee who wouldn't advance me a penny at the muzzle of a gun! And there you are!"

"But if our search to-morrow is convincing to me, I will gladly loan you five hundred more, so that will give you two thousand."

"But you are in it with me," rejoined Vance, firmly. "Whatever we find or whatever we do, it's share and share alike."

"That is generous of you, more than that," came the soft answer. "But it is your find, and it belongs to you."

"We will say 'us' in the future, so let that settle it. You and Myra have been Pa and Ma to me now for two years, and yours is the only home I have, and it shall be 'us' in this, as I say."

And then the tall young man and short grey-bearded one watched the moon's rippled path in silence for a full five minutes.

"We must play a foxy game to-morrow," Vance finally asserted, "for while Levi has always been a faithful guide, he has a little Indian in him and we absolutely must not be found out by him. The only plan to fool him that I can think of is for you (a professor of geology, as he knows) to devote the day to an exploring trip over this mountain with me along to pop over stray birds

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that come our way. We can take a light lunch and let both our guides go fishing."

Both guides were lazily stretched on blankets in front of the open fire and still smoking, when Vance and the Professor joined them and drew up to the cheerful flames. They also filled and lit corn-cobs and then Vance, in mildly curious tone, addressed Levi. "How much do you suppose Uncle Terry paid for this quarter-section to try a hermit's life in?" he asked. "And what is it worth to-day?"

"Wal," answered Levi slowly and after two or three meditative puffs, "I should guess he got it fer 'bout two thousand, fer ten years ago these pulp-mill folks hadn't begun to bid up on timber lands. But now it's wuth all o' ten times that. Why, the standin' timber, a good half-mile on't 'longside the lake shore 'n' back 'o the mountain, 'ud fetch that alone."

"And does he still own it, do you know?" Vance next queried in the same indifferent tone. "If so, he's got a melon sure."

"I dunno who owns it now," answered Levi, glancing at the impassive face of Vance. "But I could find out at Milton Mills when we go out. I know Job Ross, who owns a full section east o' this, 'n' the richest timber owner in these parts,

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with a big sawmill at Fort Kent on the St. Francis, stood ready to buy this quarter-section 'n' give ten thousand five years ago. Now it bein' 'longside the lake, 'n' includin' 'bout fifty rods above the lake 'n' 'long the opposite shore to jest across from the brook whar we landed, makes it more valuable. Ye see, it's a right o' way to the upper half o' the lake. Ye hain't any 'tention o' buyin' it?" he added, after lighting his pipe. "It 'ud be a good investment to buy 'n' hold if ye wanted one, fer from the way pulp-mills are eatin' into timber lands, even scrub stuff, why, this corner lot'll be wuth a small fortin five years from now. I'd buy this myself right now if I had the money."

"How much would be needed in cash to do it?" questioned Vance with more interest.

"'Bout five thousand, I callate; with six per cent. on mortgage, 'n' taxes."

"Well, if I owned a pulp-mill I might consider it," rejoined Vance, after thus obtaining all the information he wanted and a good deal more. Then he filled and lit his pipe to try to cheer himself up, for the fact was that Levi's story of the timber-land situation had put a very wet blanket over his hopes. Both the Professor and himself, combining all their means, were now helpless.

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"Oh, if only my good father were alive," Vance thought with a sudden heart-pang, "what might we not do!" Then his mind reverted to the smooth-tongued, designing widow who had "landed" his easy-going and unworldly father five years before, and, worse still, persuaded him to will all his ample fortune to her, excepting only an annuity of two thousand for the son. Barely enough to exist upon. How bitter Vance had felt when the family lawyer had read the will! How he had longed to smite that pompous man when congratulated upon his good fortune in the annuity. How he had "said things" with teeth in them to his stepmother that evening, while she shed a few crocodile tears. A week later he had packed his belongings and, quitting the "house of theft," as he now called his home, had easily persuaded his good friend and old tutor, Professor Moss, to take him as a boarder. Each recollection returned now with added bitterness. Also the consciousness that close beside this wildwood cabin stood a low mountain which might contain a vast fortune, yet was almost as much beyond his reach as one of the diamond mines of Kimberly!

The fire burned lower until only a glow of embers was left. The chill of a September evening

paced advance mournfully, unrolling
a blanket while his companion did t
Well, maybe and maybe not," came
a faint whisper. "If only this Uncle
is the place and is the sort of man
I, I still see a way out of the com
will see what we can find to-morrow.

CHAPTER II

AT breakfast the next morning, while enjoying broiled partridges, bacon and eggs, coffee, and Levi's most excellent hot corn-bread, Vance assured Levi that the Professor, whose hobby was volcanic rocks of earlier or later upheaval, would spend the day in exploring the mountain close by, while he himself would go along to bring back a string of birds. Also that he and Jean could gather moss enough for two of the cabin bunks, cut and split some dry fuel, and then go fishing if they chose. A plausible tale which he felt sure would give the Professor and himself a long day of freedom. He had also that morning found a hatchet minus a handle, a chisel, and, most valuable of all, a pickaxe. Into the hatchet he had inserted a crude handle, well stayed by nails, and while both guides had been busy cooking, had hastily carried and hidden his tools in the ravine. With breakfast over and an ample lunch in his hunting-coat pocket, Vance shouldered his gun. The Professor, with small hammer in hand and leather specimen pouch on

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his shoulder, joined him, and both with hearts unduly throbbing, started in quest of fortune.

Never before in the lives of either had come one moment so tingling, so thrilling, and so momentous as this.

The tools secured, Vance, not even hearing a partridge that rose from the path ahead, almost leaped up the rock-tangled gully to the crevasse, now the apex of their hopes. It was perhaps five feet long by two feet wide, with both ends beginning and ending under flat rocks. As but one could work in it at a time, Vance began scraping away mould, each minute finding one to five of the precious crystals, mostly of a green shade, and tossing them to the Professor, who sat close by. Next, after the entire pocket had been gone over, Vance took his chisel and began digging. Each thrust disclosed one or more of the coveted gems. In fact, that narrow bed of hard gravel with a little sand was fairly peppered with tourmalines and nearly all green! For two hours, or until the rising sun glanced down the mountain-side, Vance dug and pawed oblivious of all else. His hands grew black, bloody, and filth-coated, yet he knew it not. The sweat gathered on his face and trickled from his chin in spite of the cool September morn, until every

muscle of his body was in sore revolt and he finally gave up to rest. Then, like good miners, who spread their nuggets to fondle and weigh them, so did these two empty the Professor's specimen-pouch upon a flat rock to count and guess the value of its contents. Over two quarts of gems had been secured, numbering more than four hundred.

"How much?" queried Vance eagerly after the Professor had spread their find in rows according to size upon this broad flat stone. The little man did a short example in multiplication.

"Oh, forty thousand dollars for a guess," he said and then Vance gave a long, low whistle.

"Do you know, Pro," he exclaimed, "I can feel all sense of honesty leaving me right now! Think of it! Twenty thousand apiece! And no one the wiser! And both of us almost like church-mice."

"Well," rejoined the Professor, now scraping the gems by handfuls back into his pouch, "it is my turn to work. Let's dig and scoop every bit of gravel out of that crevasse, spread it upon this rock, and go over it carefully. I know you have missed dozens of stones in your haste while pawing and digging the gravel back and forth." And without another word he pulled off his cap, jumped into the narrow crevasse, and began to fill that

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and pass it up to Vance to empty. How long it took to clear out the little pit neither knew. Only that Vance, rapidly sorting or going over the gravel carefully, found a full quart more of gems, mostly of small size.

The Professor then discovered that although the gravel-bed ended a little under the edge of the flat stone above, it extended below the lower one. How far he could not tell. Only that by thrusting his chisel down the two-inch space, he found it entered gravel.

"Pry up or blast away that flat cap-rock," he said, pointing to it, "and you will find more gems." And then, true to his hobby, now that the gem-digging was over, he began to examine the rocks alongside, and above and below the empty crevasse.

"All the signs," he kept exclaiming gleefully. "Lapidolite, albite, feldspar, and mica quartz. Some day, maybe a few hundred centuries ago, this mountain had an upheaval, splitting it open right here and maybe elsewhere. Tourmalines were once gases, my son," he added, returning to where Vance sat beside the precious pouch, now full of them.

"Just organic gases caught and held in pockets while the earth's crust was cooling. These gases

THE HEART OF UNCLE TERRY 25

also cooled or condensed, forming crystals as you see them, and became mixed with gas-formed gravel and sand. Probably it was ice during the glacial period that split the flat rock in the gully where you found your gems. I have no doubt that if this gully were cleared of all loose boulders, many more tourmaline pockets would be exposed. And now," concluded the Professor, "it is up to us to decide what chances to take."

"I'm feeling like the little fellow who scooted as soon as he'd stowed all the pilfered nuts and candy he could inside his shirt." Then Vance patted the bag of gems tenderly.

"But you won't run away," rejoined the Professor, who knew Vance as he was. "What you can do and retain self-respect is to keep still about our find until we know where we are with the owner of this mountain. I think the courts would allow us half value for salvage. And, to the best of my judgment, that bag holds forty thousand dollars' worth of gems!" Then, glancing at his watch, he added, "Do you know it's two o'clock and I'm some hungry? Let's go down to the brook, wash, and eat."

This accomplished, both returned to the empty pocket, hid the tools under a flat rock farther up the gully, and then kept on to the top of the

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mountain and sat down to rest. From here they could look down over cabin and lake, and far up at its head they saw their two guides in a canoe. "All's well so far," remarked Vance, "but now what shall we do with our bag of gems until we break camp, which I think we would better do soon?"

"Why, it is either hide them away from camp, or in the cabin, and of the two, I think right about here is safest. No sportsman would be apt to climb up here."

An opening beneath a flat rock, almost hidden by scrub-spruce and vines and a few rods below the eastern apex of the mountain, was the selection; and the precious pouch was tucked well out of sight of possible passers.

"I should feel a little safer," Vance then declared, "if we pitched that gravel back to place in the pocket," and that was next done. Naturally, also, the two gem-hunters now returned to the brook and up the ravine, Vance to pot a few birds and the Professor to find another promising gully. Luck came to Vance first and frequently in the shape of a dozen of those stupidly tame partridges, while the Professor, following, watched for outcropping rocks akin to those in the gully. The sun was well down ere he, too, was rewarded by a "Hello" from Vance and hastening on, found him

at the foot of another rock-filled gully extending up the north side of the mountain.

"Looks promising, I thought," he said, squatting on a flat rock and filling his pipe. Then the little man, glancing at the rocks glittering with feldspar and mica, moss-coated on top, pushed up this narrow scrub-filled gorge as fast as the tangle would permit. Ten rods up he gave a hilarious, "Come here, son ; I've found something!" Vance, following, came to the Professor kneeling and closely examining a black excrescence the size of a filbert and protruding from a narrow strip of flat, grey and purple bed-rock, just below the upright face of the solid mountain, fully twenty feet high.

"I've found a sentinel, boy, a never-failing sign," he almost shouted as Vance came up, pointing to what looked like a bit of black-brown coal, half embedded in the rock. "There may be another," he added gleefully, scraping away the moss along the base of the upright rock, "but whether there is or not, just below our sentinel, or not far away, is a pocket of tourmalines, sure as the sun rises." Then he arose, slapped Vance on the back, and both shook hands.

"You see," the Professor next explained, "when the earth's crust was in a semi-molten condition, pockets of organic gases like bubbles in a pot of

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boiling pudding were caught and held below the cooling surface. Just the same as gases are held within bars of molten iron, running out to form bars and called blow-holes. These tourmaline pockets are only monster blow-holes, made when the earth was born and from certain gases quite rare. Later, in the continual upheaval of the slowly-cooling earth crust, volcanic action we call it, mountains of all heights were pushed up, often in long ranges, split apart by narrow, deep canyons. Parts of ranges also arose, separated by long valleys, while here and there, as in this State, a jumble of separated mountains of all sizes came up. And among these, only two that I recall have produced tourmalines. Now, this black excrescence, which looks like coal, but is almost as hard as a diamond, was a gaseous bubble that almost escaped the main pocket to harden from one to many feet above. And when finding them we call them sentinels, for almost invariably a pocket of tourmalines is found near by. Green is the prevailing color, and those are the hardest and most valuable."

"I guess it's time to hike for camp," Vance then interjected, consulting his watch. "It's almost six o'clock."

"I am going clear around this little mountain

to-morrow," responded the Professor in slightly vexed tone. "If I can find another sentinel, I will sell my shirt to get control of this mountain, for I am now convinced it contains a fortune."

"It wouldn't cost over a thousand to buy and tote in a small boiler and drilling-machine," rejoined Vance, planning far ahead as was his wont. "I hope this Uncle Terry is still owner here; for from Levi's statement he isn't one to drive hard bargains."

Arriving at the foot of the gully, from which they had picked so valuable a pouch of gems that day, and crossing the small brook a few rods above the open plot in front of the cabin, Vance, glancing down, saw a peculiar hole in the sand, round, about three inches deep, and nearly that in diameter. It was evidently freshly made, about a foot from the small rill from which a little water had percolated into the hole. So odd a sight was it, not made by any animal; only a hole apparently punched in by a round piece of wood, that Vance stooped to examine it, as did the Professor. Then, curious still, both hunted around for another. None appeared, and after one more look at it both headed for the cabin.

Small trout were frying in a big pan, potatoes boiling, a coffee pail hanging from the crane, and,

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best of all, biscuits baking in a small tin baker in front of the open fire.

"It's a sportsman's paradise right here," declared the Professor an hour later after they had again strolled down to the canoes for privacy. "The guides have fixed up the cabin so it's more than comfortable now. Also sweet and clean. Levi says he saw two deer up at the head of the lake this afternoon. You have shot more birds than we can eat for three days, we have a small fortune hidden away on the mountain, and I say let's stay and enjoy it until next Friday, then stop at Bristol for Sunday, on our way home. I want you to meet my old aunt now over ninety, also hear the young minister there, who my aunt says is preaching rank heresy. You know she believes the Bible literally, Ark, story of Jonah and the whale, and all the miracles. She'd enjoy discussing them with you."

"Excuse me from that," rejoined Vance. "But I'll keep you company and discuss what to do next. To my mind, we are facing a big, big dilemma. We have a fortune in tourmalines that will certainly be claimed by their actual owner if he hears about them. Meantime, according to Levi, we couldn't buy more than the old cabin."

The young moon as usual twinkled its silver

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path adown the long lake. The brook, now a small rill, tinkled musically close by. An owl once more hooted twice from the mountain-side, while answering him from up the lake came the almost human "Halloo" of a loon.

"Do you know," continued Vance after a long interim, "that to-night seems a more eerie one than last night? Somehow I wish we'd risked it and brought that bag of tourmalines to camp. What if some Indian hunter or trapper had spied upon us to-day?"

"And I can't get that queer track out of my mind! It wasn't a deer, I'm sure, but made by the end of a big round stick."

"Well, you make me feel creepy, you and the loon together," responded the Professor as that weird "Halloo" came down the lake once more. "I never knew before what a human sound a loon's call has. As for a spy, why, even if one watched us, how could he find the pouch?"

"Why, trail us; that's easy to Indians or trappers. And we were so nearly insane while digging out those gems we never even looked around. I didn't, I know."

"Nor I," rejoined the Professor, catching Vance's vague surmises. "But, pshaw, it's only that blasted loon!"

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"Let's go up and fetch the pouch to camp," responded Vance, rising and glancing at the sinking moon.

"Too late," returned the little man, also rising and looking westward. "Why, the moon will set before we could even climb the mountain."

And so, after borrowing so much anxiety, they both returned to the cabin, when Vance informed Levi that they would hunt around the mountain on the morrow, while he might go up the lake and shoot a deer.

"I'm not fond of killing them," he added. "The last one I shot brought tears to me with his dying bleat and the look in his eyes, as you slit his throat, Levi. Do you remember that, up on the Moosehorn?"

"Yes, it is kinder techin'. I sorter feel that way myself, now 'n' then."

Then Vance and the Professor sought sleep.

After a breakfast of more trout and broiled partridge, Vance asked Levi to pass his opinion upon the queer hole beside the brook. They saw that it was nearly full of water now. Then the more wood-wise Levi, without a word, began a keen examination of the banks above, and found first one, then another of the same indentations, but more shallow in the hard soil, and about three feet

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apart. In fact, a trail of them leading up to the foot of the gully where Vance had found the tourmaline pocket. Levi next led the way back on the opposite side of the brook until, just across from the deep hole in the sand, he found one more faintly visible.

"Well," queried Vance anxiously, who with the Professor had followed this trailing, "who made them, a one-legged man?"

"That's 'bout it," responded Levi, "'n' I'm dern sorry to see 'em. Them holes war made by a sneakin', thievin' cuss, called Peg-leg. He lives up on Squash Lake in a slate shack he built thar, 'n' follers campers spring 'n' fall, 'n' steals anything he kin carry off when they're away. His real name is Joe Bonette, 'n' he's part Injun, part Canuck, 'n' all low-down sneak-thief. He got his foot caught in a bear-trap some years ago, 'n' had to drag it over ten miles to a settlement to get free. O' course they had to take his leg off at the knee, 'n' since then he stumps round on a stick lashed to his knee. He must 'a' ben follerin' us up here 'n' layin' low, fer them tracks war made yesterday arternoon, sure. The wonder is he didn't swipe his canoe full, when we war away 'n' camp left open."

"Well, you would better not leave it so again,"

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Vance directed, with an ominous tug at his feelings. "Damn such a sneak-thief as that," he added, viciously. "I'd like to fill him full of bird-shot just for luck."

"Wal, he got a good come-back from a party o' hunters campin' up on the Musquacook, two years ago last fall. They left 'most everything o' course, goin' out huntin', 'n' Peg-leg waitin' 'n' watchin' stole their whole outfit, blankets, ammunition, rum, canned stuff, tobacco, 'n' two guns. Likewise all the tin dishes 'n' table ware, a clean sweep. O' course he left his peg-leg track so their guides knew who 'twar, 'n' they war so mad they paddled clean down to Fort Kent, got dynamite, 'n' come back to his shack 'n' blew it to smithereens. They got out a warrant fer him, too, but up to now no officer has dared to serve it." Then Levi, having told his story, hastened back to camp while Vance and the Professor, both feeling all a-tremble, hurried up the gully, Vance ahead, and arriving at the top, he fairly dove down to the shelving rock, beneath which they had hidden a fortune, thrust his hand under it, pawed all around, and then sat up and moaned.

"My God," he said, "it's gone!"

CHAPTER III

SOME men meet serious loss courageously, some dejectedly, and a few optimistically. In this case, Vance met his with dejection, while the Professor, probably to cheer up the young man who was like a son to him, essayed to take it cheerfully. First he began a thorough hunt for flat rocks all about, assuring Vance that he might have made a mistake in location. Next, convinced that none had been made, he filled and lit his corn-cob, sat down and said, "Come, son, fill up your pipe and let's smoke and philosophize. After all, those gems were not ours, anyway. We were only holding them in trust, as it were. Besides, this Peg-leg, who must have stolen them, will inevitably hide most of his loot, then take a few to some big village like Fort Kent and sell them. If so, we can get out a warrant, and when he shows up to sell more, have him arrested."

"Yes," responded Vance disgustedly, "and by doing so set the whole town wild to find where the gems came from."

"But meantime we may be able to buy or lease

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this mountain and so control it. Besides, I am positive I've located another pocket, so cheer up, go and shoot a few more partridges, while I go prospecting."

And here it must be allowed that Vance, brought up as a rich man's only son, and naturally expecting to inherit the lion's share of his father's fortune in due time, only to have the golden illusion end as it did, should be excused for a few hours' dejection just now. He followed the Professor, however, in his further quest for "sentinels" and rock signs, grew interested in his frequent finding of so many signs, and when, after two hours' search, another gully was found on the east side of the mountain, filled with the same gray and purple lapidolite with albite outcroppings, and almost due east of the first one, he began to feel some of the Professor's exultation over it.

"Why, I believe this mountain is stuffed full of tourmalines," the latter exclaimed, "and with these loose rocks removed and bed-rock visible, a dozen sentinels might be uncovered in either gully." Then both pushed on up this gorge to the top of the mountain and sat down to cool off and decide what to do.

From here was visible the entire four-mile-long lake, named "Cant-hook" from its slight resem-

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blance to that tool. Uncle Terry's cabin lay almost at their feet, with a faint column of smoke from its chimney, showing dinner to be in process, while to eastward lay an unbroken level of dense forest.

"I doubt if this Uncle Terry has ever sold his quarter-section," observed the Professor, after a long scrutiny of the beautiful panorama of sparkling lake and billowing forest, combined with so much valuable timber, yet standing alongside an open waterway to mills below. "If he had, it would be to some lumberman who would have been devastating the fine timber long ago. Now Levi says this Uncle Terry came from some point called the Cape. You can easily locate him and find how the land lies. Also, if he is the owner, make the best deal you can. Meanwhile, let us forget our loss, feel that it is spilt milk, and enjoy our six days of outing. Then, back to my college work for me, and to tourmalines for you."

"And do you really feel faith enough in that plan to invest five hundred or a thousand dollars in it, with as much more by me?"

"Why, certainly," rejoined the Professor, eagerly. "I know my eyes haven't deceived me; besides I have an acquaintance by the name of Ross Bickford, who owns a tourmaline mine in Maine and once came to me for information upon the

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formation of those peculiar gems. We coincided, of course, upon that point, but I found he knew far more than I about surface indications. And we spent an entire evening discussing them."

"I think a thousand dollars would buy and transport a boiler and drilling-machine here," mused Vance, "and another thousand would blast and clear out my gully or the one where your sentinel peeps up. Or we might clear the gully first and see what shows up."

"You forget also that there is a half-pocket below the one we cleaned out," replied the Professor, cheerfully, "and a drill with a few pounds of giant powder would open that." And thus was Vance returned to normal mood, with the hope of good luck and fortune still in view.

When they reached camp, Levi displayed a fine young buck he had shot that morning and after dinner it was decided that both Vance and the Professor should circumnavigate the lake, starting in opposite directions to shoot birds on the shores. "We can take a few out ; they will keep if drawn," Vance asserted and so the plan was carried out.

And now with Levi slowly wielding his paddle, while Vance kept an eye on the shore ahead for birds, he began another cross-examination anent this outlaw, Peg-leg, and his habits.

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"He's a sorter wanderin' thief from spring to fall," Levi explained, "trailin' fishin' parties in the spring, but not swipin' much from any one since he got his shack blowed up, so I hear. Jest a ham, maybe, or a' few cans o' fruit, or a bag o' flour. He keeps out o' sight allus, so few ever see him, 'n' while those who get touched cuss some, that's the end on't. I callate the warnin' he got by havin' his cabin blowed up done him good. He built it up, o' course, 'n' last winter trapped some round Squash Lake. No fishin' parties ever go thar, fer it's jest a small mud-bottom lake with no trout in it, 'n' all swamp for miles around. Trappers don't locate thar much either, knowin' Peg-leg's habits, so he's left mostly alone. I callate he located thar knowin' he would be. He goes down to Fort Kent now 'n' then to sell furs, buy ammunition, 'n' have a drunk. Thar's a woman thar, who works in a wooden-ware shop, by name o' Sil Holland he's kinder stuck on, they say, 'n' ez she's served time fer stealin', they're a fit pair."

"And so he could be found at Squash Lake late in the fall or winter?" queried Vance.

"Wal, most o' the time now, since he lost his leg. He uster do pot-huntin' fer lumber camps, but ez he can't use snow-shoes, he's gin that up.

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He has one he screws onto his wooden stump, but he dassent go far from camp with it in deep snow, so jest sets 'n' tends a few traps 'round the shore o' his lake."

"And no officer or warden dare serve a writ on him, you said?"

"Wal, no one ever did arter the big steal he made from that huntin' party. Mebbe they figured thar wa'n't no proof he did the stealin', so let it go. 'N' thar ain't none, 'cause he's never ben caught yit. Only he let it out once down to Fort Kent, when he had a jag on. Told this Holland woman how slick he war, 'n' o' course she told everybody she knew, ez might be expected."

"Where does this Uncle Terry live?" Vance next queried after a brief interim during which he had filled and lighted his pipe. "That is, if you know that he is still alive?"

"Wal, I heard he come from a place called the Cape, 'n' uster keep a lighthouse thar. I only saw him once the fall arter he built this cabin. I war guidin' a gent by the name o' Harrison, who war huntin' to git a big moose-head. We come to this lake kinder curis to see this hermit. I'd heard he'd built a big cabin here, 'n' found him the best-hearted sort o' man I ever run across. He was splittin' wood in front o' the cabin ez we

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come up to it, but quit when he see us 'n' come right to meet us. 'I'm mighty glad to see somebody human,' he said, "'n' I want to hev ye come right in, make yerselves tew hum, 'n' stay all night.' O' course my gent shook hands with him then, 'n' arter a spell o' talk 'n' lookin' the big cabin over 'lowed we would. He got supper: briled venison, fried trout, corn-bread baked afore the fire, with coffee, doughnuts, 'n' canned cherries, a big layout. I set to choppin' 'n' splittin' wood while he cooked, 'n' talked with my sport. 'N' arter supper they talked stiddy, he doin' the most 'n' tellin' funny stories by the dozen, one 'bout how he'd got stuck buyin' gold-mine stock o' a lawyer. 'N' 'bout another, who stuck him fer four hundred by a sharp game. He sartinly had it in fer lawyers. All the time I kept wonderin' why sich a jolly, good-hearted man wanted to come here 'n' live like a hermit! He let a little light in on 't jest afore we turned in, 'n' 'twar kind o' techin', too.

“ ‘I s'pose you're wonderin' why I come here to live alone,' he said to my gent. 'I ain't goin' to, only a couple o' months more, then in the spring I'll bring my wife in fer company. Ye see,' he said arter waitin' a minute, 'I've ben through suthin' that's made my wife 'n' me sick o' seein'

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or hearin' the ocean any more. 'N' that's why we're tryin' the woods, 'n' I callate on spendin' the rest o' my years right here.' He seemed so kind o' worked up that we, neither on us, wanted to ask any questions."

"Well, he was an odd stick," responded Vance, when the unique tale was told, "but it seems he couldn't stand a hermit life, or maybe his wife wouldn't. They usually rule the roost in such matters."

For a full twenty minutes longer, or until they had almost reached the head of the lake, Vance puffed his pipe contentedly, while watching the lake shore with glances into the vista of tall tree-trunks beyond, then suddenly espied a flock of partridges grouped in an opening. To land, shoot two while they waited, and six more in singles after they had hidden, then declared themselves by a "Peep peep," was an easy task for Vance. Four more were added to the string on the way back, and when the two canoes met and landed, the Professor laid five landlocked salmon on the greensward as his share of the day's sport.

With so much fish and game in the larder, it was folly to take more, so the next morning both Vance and the Professor cruised up and down the three promising ravines ever on the watch for

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"sentinels." They also, with the aid of two big saplings, tried to pry up the flat rock below the empty pocket, but failed. Vance next tried another plan, and with pickaxe, hammer, and chisel chipped away enough of the lower edge to admit his hand. Then, with his chisel, he dug into the almost solid gravel. It was slow work, but after twenty minutes of it he loosened and drew out a prize, a fair-sized, bright green tourmaline!

It was greeted with a hurrah from both, more especially because it proved the Professor's assertion that beneath the flat boulder was another bed of gems. And the rest of that morning they worked with scratched and bleeding hands, although taking turns. In the afternoon they came again to pry up bits of hard gravel, ever hoping it to be a gem, but gave up and hid the tools for good when sunset drew near and they had secured five small gems and one big one.

But camp life now began to pall upon them. "It's too easy living here," Vance declared the next morning, and they started for one more climb up or down the three gullies in search of "sentinels." "We have more venison than we can eat in two weeks. Half the fish have been pitched into the lake and an hour hunting or fishing each day will keep our larder stocked. Then this in-

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fernal mountain has got on my nerves. I dreamed last night of seeing a one-legged Indian leaping down a rocky gorge. It was so funny, too, that I woke up laughing."

"Well, that is a good sign," said the Professor, smiling. "As long as you can laugh you are healthy."

For almost three hours they crept up and down first one then another of the three gullies, always in search of bed-rock, and scraping away the moss or coating of hemlock needles from it when found. Vance gave up first, leaving the Professor midway of the east-side gully, and mounting to the top, sat down, lit his pipe, and began to scan the lake below and the wide vista of unbroken wilderness all around.

Just then he heard the Professor shout, "Hurrah! Come here, Vance!"

Vance obeyed, and leaping down the gorge found his companion again kneeling, and examining another black "sentinel" almost the size of half an egg!

"I told you, boy, this mountain is stuffed full of tourmalines," he exclaimed gleefully, "so let's get busy. It's now Tuesday. By starting early we can reach civilization and a railroad late to-morrow night by hiring a team at Milton Mills. That will

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give us two days to hunt up this man, Uncle Terry, and get to Bristol by Saturday night. What do you say?"

"It's a go," replied Vance. "We'll see this through together. And another three days here would be a positive bore to me."

And so with a plausible excuse to their guides and promise of full pay for the week, did Vance and his companion leave the most charming spot in the wilderness they had ever found. Also the cabin in good order and clean, which is more than some sportsmen ever do.

It was late in the afternoon, two days after, that Vance and the Professor, sole occupants of an old well-worn carryall with loquacious driver, were journeying down Southport Island along a road seldom traveled, to halt on a hilltop overlooking a small, placid, and almost entirely enclosed harbor. A tall white lighthouse towered beyond. A fringe of little brown houses, with a few white ones and a small church, surrounded the harbor. A typical coast fishing-village in fact, composed of honest, frugal fisher-folk and having the most romantic and picturesque harbor on the Maine coast. This quaint fishing-village has always, even during King George's time, been known as the "Cape."

"Thar's the lighthouse Uncle Terry uster keep,"

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the driver next informed them. "Kept it fer 'most thirty years, then got sorter oneasy 'n' went up into the woods to try livin' thar. He 'n' Aunt Lissy come back two years arter, 'n' he bought that island," pointing to a small, high green-covered one to the left and a quarter-mile outside the harbor entrance, "'n' he's livin' thar now. He's got a 'dopted darter, Olivia Oaks, 'Ollie,' they call her, who keeps school in the village," he continued, now driving on. "They say thar ain't no need on't, 'cause Uncle Terry's purty well fixed, 'n' havin' 'dopted her legally, she havin' no parents livin', why, she'll git nuff to keep her quite a spell. But she's sorter headstrong, 'lows she enjoys arnin' 'nough to keep her in clothes. She's away jest now, visitin' up kentry, but you'll find Uncle Terry to hum.

"Be ye wantin' to go out to-night, or wait till mornin'?" this Ancient Mariner, now stage-driving, next queried as they entered the village. "If ye wait, I kin put ye up ez I do most o' the runners who come here."

"I guess you had best put us up," responded Vance, wondering how far this talkative old fellow's curiosity would lead him. "Our coming is on a matter of business with this Uncle Terry. It won't need more than an hour or so, and we must

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go back in the morning. Can you find some one who will take us out, wait, and bring us back? I will pay him well."

"Wal, I callate Abner'll do it if he ain't too tired. He's ben haulin' pots all day."

Twilight was fading when Vance and the Professor stepped ashore or on a float at the end of a V-shaped inlet on the shoreward side of the island where Uncle Terry lived.

"You'll find his house right over on the island by follerin' the path," Abner, a stalwart youth of twenty, directed. "'N' 'bout how soon'll ye go back?" he added.

"Oh, make it nine-thirty," answered Vance, consulting his watch, then leading the way up the weed-draped stairs. A short walk, twisting and turning among rocks, soon brought them to a small cottage standing in a triangular open space and facing the ocean, four rods away. A cheerful light shone from within.

For a moment Vance halted, not quite sure how best to open his business call, for it seemed a momentous one; then boldly strode up to the front door and knocked.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Vance knocked, the door was quickly opened and a tall, grey-haired man, with pointed grey beard, keen eyes, bushy eyebrows, and in shirt-sleeves, opened it.

To the respectful, "Good-evening, sir," of Vance came a cheery "Good-evenin'; come in," and the two callers entered to have chairs drawn up to the bright open fire by a rotund old lady, who immediately left the room.

"My name's Vance Harper and this is my friend, Professor Moss," began Vance, "and we came here to find if you cared to sell the quarter-section of timber land, mountain, and lake you own in Township Forty-two."

"Wal, I hain't thought on't," came the pleasant answer. "I might, though, if somebody wanted it fer a summer home. But I wouldn't sell to a lumberman 'n' have the timber cut. I s'pose you're that sort," he added, glancing curiously from Vance to the Professor.

"No, we are not lumbermen and have no idea

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of that. In fact, and to be perfectly frank, we would rather not buy the timber land, only a strip including the mountain, the cabin, and the two plots of cleared land."

"Wantin' to make a summer home up thar?" asked Uncle Terry, looking relieved. "The fact is I'm agin this wholesale cuttin'-off o' timber. I bought that section callatin' to live out my years thar, but 'twas too lonesum fer Lissy, 'n' we gin it up. 'Twas a freak notion o' mine to git away from the sound o' waves, but I found they war more company 'n I realized, 'n' o' course thar was a reason why they was sad-like ten years ago, but that's all over, anyway. If that's all ye want, I guess we kin dicker."

Vance, who had planned to be secretive in his bargain-driving, hesitated a moment before answering. This man was evidently a kindly soul, with tender heart, and strictly honest. The story Levi had told and Uncle Terry's manner were both proof positive of that. To try to deceive such a man was obnoxious to Vance, and on the instant he resolved to tell the truth.

"No," he answered frankly, "I am not planning a summer home there. I couldn't afford that. Instead, it is to hunt for tourmalines in the mountain that we, the Professor and I, want pos-

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session. I don't wish to deceive you ; I am sure you are honest yourself, and that would be unfair." Then Vance told the entire story, omitting only the discovery of "sentinels," and minimizing the quantity of gems stolen to be "a little over two quarts." "Of course," he concluded, "there may be more pockets found and there may not. That is the risk of it. To clear out those gullies in hope of finding another pocket will cost many thousand dollars. To clear even one would need at least a thousand."

"Wal," responded Uncle Terry, smiling benignly at Vance, "I'm mighty glad ye told me the facts. I hate a deceiver from the word 'go.' 'N' now I guess we kin dicker. How much would ye be willin' to pay fer what land ye want, or would ye rather lease it on a fair per cent. o' what ye found? I know minin' is risky business. I bought a goldmine once myself," he added smiling, "'n' I've got the hole yit. Also the one in my pocketbook."

"And how much would you consider a fair percentage on lease?" queried Vance eagerly, after a laugh at Uncle Terry's terse way of telling how he had been swindled.

"Wal, what would ye put it at?"

"Why, I don't know, to be honest," rejoined Vance, thoughtfully. "I'd rather you named that

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yourself. It's your property." And then Uncle Terry arose, took a jar of cigars from a "what-not" in the corner of the room, passed them to his callers, filled and lit a corn-cob pipe, and sat down again.

"I'm like Injuns meetin' fer a confab," he admitted, smilingly. "Allus want to smoke the pipe o' peace fust. Now the rule among fishermen is, one-third's the boat's, one fer captain and outfit, 'n' one fer the crew. Now, ez you found the stuns, furnish the outfit, 'n' take all risk, I'll let ye call it fifteen or twenty per cent., whichever ye feel it's wuth."

"Well, I shall say that twenty is entirely fair," responded Vance, turning to the Professor, and adding, "What do you say?"

"Oh, most certainly," answered that gentleman. "I am fully satisfied with that proposition, coupled, of course, with permission for us to use what timber we need for another cabin for men, and perhaps a more roomy house later on. If we strike pay-gravel, I'd like to bring Myra and our niece up in Bristol to stay during my summer vacation."

"Oh, sartinly; that's fair," replied Uncle Terry at once. "'N' all ye need fer workin', 'n' fer fuel. A half-acre won't be missed outer the two hundred or more I own. A feller come here huntin' me up

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'bout five or six years ago," he added, relighting his pipe. "Said he wanted an option on the hull business fer a year, 'n' arter some proddin' 'lowed he was plannin' to sell it to a mill-owner at Fort Kent by the name o' Ross. Arter I turned that down, he kinder hemmed 'n' hawed 'n' finally offered me ten, then twelve, 'n' finally fifteen thousand dollars, cash down, soon ez a deed was signed. 'Wal,' I said to myself, 'if it's wuth that now, it'll be wuth twenty, mebbe thirty, in ten years more,' 'n' I said no. 'N' I callate it will," he added buoyantly, "seein' ez how the price o' lumber is goin' up with pulp-mills grindin' all the time. Even this feller riz his bid three thousand more 'fore he left. I wouldn't sell at no price now," he continued, thoughtfully. "I'm goin' to keep that piece o' timber fer Ollie. She's our 'dopted darter, 'thout a cent, 'n' no relation nearer'n a cousin or two. She's a good girl, too, 'n' been our house-warmer now fer 'most eight years. I had the chance to do it, ye see, 'n' knowin' no home could be cheerful 'thout a gal, I snapped her up right off the reel. We've had two darters afore," he continued, "one of our own that we lost when she was little, 'n' another that we 'dopted. She grew up, 'n' bein' purty, o' course got married, 'n' then ——"

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"And then what?" queried Vance softly, as Uncle Terry turned away.

"Oh, nothin', only what I hate to think on over ag'in," the old man answered, sighing. "Ye see, Telly—that was her name—come to us a gift from the waves. That is, we thought she was a gift, but she was only lent to us, arter all. They tossed her ashore one winter mornin', 'n' they took her ag'in at night—that's all.

"Ye see," with a quiver, "she 'n' her husband, a fine young feller named Page, 'n' their baby war comin' to us fer Thanksgivin', the fust one arter she left us, 'n' they war on the *City o' Portland* the night she went down. 'N' 'twas hearin' her voice in the waves every night fer two years that drove Lissy 'n' me into the woods, finally.

"Ollie don't know that, 'n' I'd ruther she didn't," he added sighing again. "It was jest the luck o' life 'n' love. A tombstun 'longside our passed highway—not hers."

Vance, deeply moved, glanced at his watch and changed the subject by asking when Uncle Terry could have the lease drawn up and ready.

"We must leave here early in the morning," he added, "and have a boatman coming out to take us ashore at nine-thirty. It is almost that now."

"Wal, I sha'n't let ye go ashore to-night," re-

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joined Uncle Terry firmly. "Thar ain't no need on't. You're more'n welcome here, 'n' I kin take ye ashore in plenty o' time fer the stage."

"But we must," returned Vance as firmly. "We left our bags at the stage-driver's, you see. We shall return to the city to make some needed arrangements for money. After that I shall go to the woods, hire a few men, and begin work. I shall run down here on my way, however."

"Wal, you must stay with us then, 'n' promise now," rejoined Uncle Terry cordially. So ended a momentous interview, of the outcome of which Vance had not even the faintest conception.

"That Uncle Terry is the nicest old fellow I ever met," Vance commented, when they were alone in the small stuffy room where the stage-driver had "put 'em up." "And keen, too," he added, beginning to disrobe. "He was light-keeper and lobster-catcher, I heard, most of his life, yet one of those sharp lumbermen couldn't fool him."

The following Saturday, just at supper-time, Vance and his "mining mate," as he had begun to call him, registered at the roomy but old-fashioned tavern at Bristol, were assigned rooms, ate supper, and then started out for a stroll through that typical country village. Also to call upon the

Professor's ancient aunt, Mrs. Wilcox, and niece Letitia, or Letty, as she was called.

"I guess you would better excuse me from the call part this evening," requested Vance when the Professor pointed out his aunt's brown house, half-hidden by lilac and syringa bushes, with monster maples in front. "She's your relative and will want to hear all about Myra; and one call from me to-morrow evening will be all that is expected. I'll go back to the hotel, smoke, and figure out money matters. I can see we must make one dollar do the work of two. You can make the proper excuses, if I'm to be martyred by a boy preacher to-morrow and a two-hour visit with your excellent, if pious, aunt. I assume she will want to argue with me upon the question of predestination, foreordination, or some other 'ation,' and I know about as much on those subjects as a Choctaw Indian."

It was ten-thirty when the Professor entered one of their connecting rooms and found Vance smoking a cob pipe, and still figuring. "I can see," he said, laying aside his pencil, "that we shall be dead broke by the time one gully is cleared from loose rocks, so that we can begin drilling."

"But we needn't wait for that," rejoined the Professor, also lighting a pipe and puffing it with

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enjoyment, after a three-hours' abstinence. "My idea is to cut a path around the rapids in the stream below the lake before winter sets in, those that won't freeze over, I mean. Then when the stream does freeze safely, haul in your machinery, and when the snow is off, begin drilling under one of our two sentinels."

"Well, that will save some, but cutting a tote-road around the rapids is going to be the big cost. As I recall, there are three, with one a full half-mile long. We shall need three men with a boy and pair of horses. I've written Levi to-night, asking what wages he and Jean would want for a six-months' job, cutting a roadway around the Cant-hook rapids and building a small house near Uncle Terry's cabin. I hinted the 'summer home' excuse so as not to stir up excitement at Milton Mills. There will be plenty of that when the truth leaks out. I've a notion," Vance added, thoughtfully, "of going to Fort Kent after I've set the men to work and see if I can find out something about our thief, Peg-leg. He may have sold a few gems to a jeweler, if there is one there. I can sleuth around, anyway, and perhaps learn something. It's worth trying. And now as to funds. How much can you, or will you, put in, Professor? I can raise a thousand on my boat. She cost three.

I've five hundred I can add. We may sell the twelve tourmalines we have for two or three hundred, and that's my stake."

"I will add a thousand, and can make it two if we must," responded the Professor earnestly. "I've as much faith in the gamble as you have, more perhaps, and I'm willing to risk so much."

"I suppose we ought to have partnership papers," declared Vance after a moment's thought, "just for Myra's sake. I've nobody in the world, but she is dependent on you; then Moss & Harper will look better in a commercial way. I shall have a check-book and Professor Lavater Moss of H—— College, mineral expert, in upper left corner of our stationery."

"And what else?" asked the Professor, smiling. "And why my name first?"

"Simply because you are an older man, have a wide and well-established reputation as a geologist, and that alone would give us some credit at the outset. I can foresee that we shall need it later on." With so much decided upon, and full of hope, the two retired.

Vance, here in this country village rather against his will, had only a perfunctory interest in the church-going plan of this Sunday morning, but nevertheless dressed carefully, and when the bell-

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call came marched manfully up to the church, resolved to sit through without yawning. He could at least con over his plans while the sermon went on.

The services opened as usual in such village churches, prayer, Scripture-reading, choir-singing, prayer again, then a hymn with all invited to rise and join. Before this, however, in glancing around, Vance had caught sight of a face just across the aisle and in the same line of pews. A girlish face of sixteen years in freshness and twenty in maturity, with tender blue eyes, long lashes, dark-brown hair, and belonging to a young lady in a simple light-grey dress with gloves to match.

Vance was not much of a lady's man, nor an admirer of society girls. His two stepsisters, Blanche and Hortense, were good examples of such. Both well past thirty, yet both aping sixteen. For this reason, perhaps, this fresh young face, like a pansy, caught his attention. He kept stealing sly glances while the services went on, until caught in so doing, when he grew cautious. Now came congregational singing, and as the small organ opened the prelude of "Coronation" and the swell of voices rose in that grand old hymn, one, clearer, sweeter, more bell-like than the others, seemed to lead them. Vance now

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ventured another glance, saw and heard that it came from that pansy face, and from that moment heard no other.

"Well, I'm paid for what's to come, anyhow," he thought, when all sat down, with a mild chorus of throat-clearings, then lapsed into thoughts of road-cutting in the woods. He scarcely heard the text-reading or the young boyish-faced minister opening his sermon. In fact, his mind was in the wilderness for the next fifteen minutes and until there came the words :

"God has given us our illusions for an all-wise purpose, and that to spur our ambition when weary, restore our courage when hopeless, and enliven our spirits when despondent. From the cradle to the grave, from sunrise to sunset of life, some new illusion, some new hope ever lures us onward."

Vance came back instantly from Uncle Terry's cabin to this faded church and the earnest, intellectual face of the young minister, who looked scarce twenty-one. He spoke earnestly, too, using only terse, simple words, and seldom glancing at his notes. And so in line with Vance's own opinions were this preacher's words that he listened spellbound to each succeeding belief briefly touched upon. First, the ones of our childhood :

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Mother Goose, Red Riding-Hood, Santa Claus. Next, our first story-book illusions, then love-fiction, and, springing from that, the more enthralling one of actual love. The ambition of wealth, power, fame, came next, each concretely treated as an illusion, until the last and greatest of all, our hope of a future existence, was reached.

And now, the young minister, discarding his notes and leaning over the small pulpit, spoke with an added earnestness and undertone of pathos :

“ But the best, the most consoling, the most needful illusion of a future Golden City ; a Promised Land beyond the dark river,” he said, “ let none seek to undermine it. Let none cast doubt upon it, nor strive to argue it out of human imagination when naught can be given in its place. It is as necessary to human existence and enjoyment as food and sunshine. In fact, it is a sun faintly shining behind the setting of our own. A beacon-light beyond the dark river. A hope that none should ever, even by a word, attempt to destroy. To the humblest, it is a well-spring of joy. To the wisest and most exalted, still a hope in spite of all materialist’s doubtings, all atheist’s sneers, or infidel’s scorn. To the poor, sick, and suffering, it is all they have to anticipate. To the rich and

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fortunate, it is yet needful. But when, how, and where is this Golden City, this Promised Land, is a matter of imagination. Human hope was the master hand that paved its pearly streets, built its jasper walls, erected its dazzling throne, and seated the Supreme One upon it, while human love attuned its harps, created its angels, and opened its beneficent gates that all akin to us, all near and dear, should enter.

“And so will human hope ever build the Eternal City anew. So will human faith ever catch the rustle of an angel’s wing when death draws near. So will human heart-hunger ever hear spirit voices calling across the dark river. And so will the beacon-light upon the Promised Land ever shine for us, just so long as its mist-hid shores are watched by love-dimmed eyes.”

Once near the close of this unusual, yet enthralling discourse, Vance had taken a sly peep at the face that had caught his attention, to find it fixed upon the minister with an absorbed yet saddened look.

And when the sermon closed with its almost pathetic words, Vance noticed a few brushing tears away. After the benediction, as he turned to leave the pew, he stood for one instant face to face with her who had so drawn his covert glances. Only

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for one second did their eyes meet, then hers dropped and an added rose-tint came to her cheeks. Somehow, too, in that brief instant Vance thought he caught the glint of unshed tears in her eyes. And then he passed out at some little distance behind her.

"Well, what have you to say?" asked the smiling Professor, when they were well away from the church. "Were you bored?"

"Not after that boy started preaching," admitted Vance, cheerfully. "Why, he's a wonder, and his closing moved many in the congregation to tears, I noticed. But he must have courage to designate Heaven as only an illusion. I guess the mossbacks gritted their teeth, however, and he'll probably be needing a new 'call' at the end of his year. They'd better double his pay and keep him. He had the church packed."

"I noticed you kept stealing glances at a pretty face just across the aisle during the opening service. Case of first impression, was it?"

"Perhaps"—smiling. "It was the sweetest face I ever saw, anyway. If I wasn't down to a bare living and liable to go broke, I'd stay here and take a look in, if I could find an introducer. But a poor devil like me had better turn away from a pretty face right at the start. To fall in

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love and marry on a crust is rank folly. The old bread, cheese, and kisses theory is played out. Love means a city mansion, summer cottage, limousine, and plenty of servants, nowadays." To this the Professor answered never a word.

The call upon his aunt passed without a clash between her and Vance, for he, realizing that a lady ninety years old was entitled to her opinions, wisely parried all questions designed to draw him out, and discussed books, mainly, with her niece. He made one unwise slip, however, if it was one, by describing the girl he had observed, and asking her name. "She's a Miss Oaks, a school-teacher from somewhere in Maine, and visiting a Mrs. Miner, who I hear was a former school-mate," came the answer.

"Pretty, isn't she?" was added, "and they say our young minister is quite enamoured of her. She has only been here about three weeks and I've only met her twice." And then Vance felt a little pang that was almost like jealousy.

It was there, too, the next morning when they trundled away by a slow train starting from this village, and kept nagging his feelings until he rose above his glum mood and began to talk plans with the Professor until the city was reached.

That evening at the Professor's modest home

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with "Mother Myra," as he often called her, showing keen interest in all their wonderful story, the dainty tea-table lit by rose-tinted incandescents, together with the cheery open fire made a charming picture. At its close the Professor passed out the little joke he had been keeping for his sister and this psychic moment.

"Vance has met his fate, Myra ; up at Bristol, yesterday," he said, smilingly. "And at church, too ; just think of that for Vance. Kept watching her through Bible-reading, long prayer, and two hymns. Wouldn't you call that a 'crush,' as they say ? Why, he even found out her name and where she was from last evening from Letty, and that the young minister was struck on her. He was so glum this morning he didn't speak for two hours."

"Oh, that's just beautiful," laughed Myra. "And so sudden, too. At first sight. Was she very lovely, Vance, dear ?" she added.

"Yes, she was," returned Vance boldly. "The sweetest face I ever saw. I'm glad I'm going to the woods, or I'd be a goner."

CHAPTER V

THE next few days were busy ones for Vance. First he had partnership papers drawn for the firm of Moss & Harper, next a will in favor of Miss Myra Lombard Moss, making her his sole legatee. "As I've no kin, I won't have those two hen-hawks, my stepmother's daughters, scrapping over anything I may leave if I starve in the woods or get drowned," he said to his lawyer, who smiled, interpolated, "Certainly ; a wise provision," and kept on dictating to his typist.

Next, Vance consulted a machinery firm, who also dealt in mining supplies ; gave an order for printed stationery with "Office, 22 Orchard Street," and attended to minor details. He next called upon Royal Sherman, editor-in-chief and controlling owner of the "Morning Argus." He had been a classmate of Vance's father, although younger, and one of his valued friends.

"I want to sell my motor-boat, the *Vixen*, or mortgage her for all I can," Vance explained after the usual greetings.

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"What for?" almost demanded Editor Sherman, staring at him in astonishment. "Why, I supposed your good father had left you so well fixed you would be buying a bigger boat instead of trying to raise money on this. Excuse me," he added hastily. "I'm not prying into your affairs, only as I thought a great deal of your father, I am surprised."

"Well, you have got another suppose coming," Vance returned, smiling, "if you will excuse the slang." Then he told the story of his practical disinheritance, and the small annuity left him.

"I don't care a rap for the feelings of my charming mother-in-law, for she did it with malice aforethought, or rather money-greed. Besides, most of her set know the facts already."

"It's a shame, an outrageous wrong," responded Sherman feelingly. "Your father often told me what a well-behaved and sensible fellow you were at college, and how he expected to take you into his business later on."

"I thank you for so much consolation," rejoined Vance, cheerfully, "but I am not weeping over lost milk or slumping in any manner. I am young, healthy, have a good education, am full of grit, and I'm going to fight my own battles and fight damned hard, too!"



"WHY, MAN ALIVE, YOU HAVE STRUCK A FORTUNE!"—Page 67.

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“ Good for you ; good ! ” responded Editor Sherman admiringly. “ And now what can I do for you about your boat, and may I ask what are your plans ? ”

“ Well, I want to raise all the money I can on my boat. She cost father over three thousand and is just as good as new, while as for my plans, if you will promise not to mention them in your paper—not a hint—I will tell you.”

“ Of course I promise,” answered Sherman, quite unconscious of the astounding news item in store, “ so fire away.”

And when Vance had “ fired away ” the whole story, Editor Sherman’s eyes were almost bulging. “ Why, man alive, you have struck a fortune ! ” he exclaimed. “ I know Moss ; besides, both my boys now in college say he’s a wonder in geology. If he says tourmalines are there, they are there. All you need is capital to find them. But you are on the wrong track altogether, my son. What you want to do is make a stock company, keeping control yourself, of course. I’ll boom it and in a week you can sell all the stock you want. Of course you can show the few gems you saved out of the steal as proof. Your friend, Moss, will write a geologic description and he is so well known here it will cut ice for you. On top of that

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I will give you three hundred dollars for a page story of what you have told, besides sending a man to take photos of the mountain, the gully, and the pocket you emptied. Also the other gullies, the old man's cabin and all, to use in connection with the story."

"But Professor Moss is with me in this plan, partner in fact, putting in two thousand dollars and I have the papers in my pocket ready to sign. Besides I am promised a twenty-year lease from this old man, Uncle Terry, and shall get it sure. He's honest beyond all question." And then Editor Sherman thought for a moment.

"It may be best for you to keep the find all in your own hands," he said. "And if you strike it rich, you have no dividends to pay after hiding all you can, as is usually the case. As for your boat, I know her, and I will advance you twenty-five hundred on your note with her for security. On top of that, and for sake of your father, I'll give you five hundred for a page write-up of the find, half the return from a canned copy of same for other papers; and twenty dollars a column for all future write-ups by you of new developments."

For the first time since his father's death, Vance had to wink hard to keep back the tears.

"I'll accept everything you so generously offer,"

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he said in a husky voice after a pause, "and furnish you the write-up before I leave. Also take your photographer or sketch-man up to the mountain as soon as I'm ready to go into the woods. He can meet me at the jumping-off place, Milton Mills, on a wired date."

"Well, come around to-morrow, with bill of sale of your boat—that's enough—and I'll fix the rest," rejoined Sherman, beginning to sharpen a pencil. "And another thing I can assure you, after your story appears, you can get all the credit you want anywhere. Dealers in mining machinery will be after you hotfoot. I'll bet by the time you have begun road-cutting, you'll have drummers to see you daily, each offering the best machinery at lowest prices. Don't be in a hurry, however. Wait till you need the machinery or specify delivery to be when called for." And then, after a hearty hand-shake, Vance walked out of that office on air!

When he recited his day's doings that evening at tea-table, Myra's eyes grew teary when Editor Sherman's part came in. "That's what you get from being a good boy at school," she said, smiling again, "and Mr. Sherman is a jewel, with few like him."

"I know his boys, too," added the Professor, "and

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they are jolly fellows. The oldest writes funny skits for our college paper. The best of your writing up the find is that it will help your credit. And I think you are right not to start a stock company. I am positive we shall find tourmalines."

The next day Vance opened a bank account in the name of Moss & Harper, using only the borrowed twenty-five hundred dollars, and leaving his own and the Professor's money in a savings bank until needed. He also placed all but the largest and first tourmaline he found in the hands of a manufacturing jeweler to be cut, and obtained the assurance that the ten would sell for about four hundred dollars. He also began work on his write-up, had it finished and in type by noon the next day, delivered it to Editor Sherman with permission to edit and add all he saw fit, bought and packed two trunks with a fur coat, heavy underwear, a portable rubber bath-tub and other needed comforts. Then, on Thursday morning, with well-filled suit-case, his rifle, shotgun, and two steel rods for luggage, he started for Uncle Terry's island home.

The railroad ride thither was tedious, the sail to the head of Southport Island more pleasant; but when once more seated in the ancient carryall of old Ben Halliday, fun began for Vance, for he had

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resolved to parry that driver's inquisitiveness by a unique yet plausible tale.

"Whar's t'other gent?" Uncle Ben queried as a starter. "Or wa'n't he needed to finish up business with Uncle Terry, fer that's what I s'pose ye're here on. O' course we all on us think a heap o' Uncle Terry 'n' so I s'pose you'll 'scuse my askin'. He's ben a sorter uncle to most on us fer 'bout forty years now, 'n' what consarns him consarns all on us."

"Why, yes, that's all right," rejoined Vance, smilingly. "We came here last week on business of a peculiar nature, or rather to talk it over with Uncle Terry and get his opinion. I am here for further discussion with him. The fact is, as you know, that lobsters are scarce and dear every summer, and growing more so. They drop in price every spring when the catching season opens, are 'way up when summer tourists arrive, and there you are. Now if you will promise absolute secrecy, I'll tell you what we have in mind."

"Why, o' course, that'll be no more'n fair," came the eager assurance.

"Well, then, your harbor offers an unusual chance for a lobster pound. All that will be needed is to double-screen the entrance with extra-heavy wire, build a curved jetty or breakwater to right of the entrance, with roller tramway for your

fishermen to use leaving or entering the harbor. That's simple, you see. Of course, we want to pay each landowner in the village a fair price for so obstructing navigation. We estimate that, all in all, it will cost from thirty to forty thousand dollars. Then all you lobster-catchers can sell us your fares at market prices. We should also buy all along the coast, fill the pound each spring, and make the Cape a big lobster market."

"Good Lord," gasped Uncle Ben, swallowing the fairy-tale in full, "'n' do ye think ye'll do it? Why, it'll upset us a lot o' course. But then, you'll pay fair fer damages. Now I own 'bout four hundred feet o' shore, two in front o' my house, 'n' two other lots o' 'bout a hundred feet front fer each. What 'ud ye callate I'd git?"

"Oh, well, I should guess perhaps a thousand dollars," responded Vance, smiling at his success in yarn-spinning. "That, of course, would have to be left to an appraisal committee, composed of two appointed by the town, two by us, and a neutral man selected by the four." And then Vance, having launched his wild tale, lit a cigar, and calmly answered the half-hour of continual questioning from Uncle Ben as vaguely as possible.

"Mind you keep mum, absolutely so, as you promised," Vance cautioned him when the over-

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looking hilltop was reached. "If it gets out, some rival business man may steal a march on us. This is only under discussion as yet."

And so mum did Uncle Ben keep that before he slept every man, woman, and child at the Cape had heard the fantastic tale.

"Be ye goin' to put up with us?" Uncle Ben inquired as they drove down into the village. "I'd be glad to hev ye."

"No, I'm invited to stay with Uncle Terry and I promised to do so. I'll want your boy to take me out as soon as possible, however." As the said "boy" had received two dollars for a ten-minutes' row out and back, he was soon forthcoming and by six-thirty Vance, suit-case in hand, knocked at Uncle Terry's abode. It was not yet dark. A lamp that moment lighted showed that supper still waited and Uncle Terry, opening the door, greeted Vance with a hand-clasp that was felt, and a "Hello! Good-evenin'. Come right in; ye're jest in time fer supper. Set another plate, Ollie," he said, turning to a trim young lady with an apron, just entering with a covered dish. "This 'ere's our gal, Ollie, Miss Oaks, I s'pose," he added with a nod at Vance. "'N' now I'll show ye to yer room. Mebbe ye'll want to wash up arter the stage-ride."

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And Vance, scarce conscious of where he was and feeling himself blush, said, "Good-evening, Miss Oaks. I am very glad to meet you," to the identical young lady he had slyly admired in the Bristol church !

He caught a quick roguish twinkle in her blue eyes as she bowed with a responsive, "Good-evening," and noticed that a slight flush came to her face, then turned and followed Uncle Terry.

"Good Lord," he whispered to himself when next alone, "but this beats finding those tourmalines. By Jove, but she's peaches and cream, all right, and buried on this island ! I can't make it out. Wonder if that boy preacher has got into her good graces," and once more Vance felt a keen pang.

When seated for the first time at Uncle Terry's table, Vance felt himself almost a blushing school-boy. Never had he felt more ill at ease. The cause of it all, however, was graciousness and dignity combined. She was the apparent hostess of the house, poured tea, passed things, served Vance, then Aunt Lissy and Uncle Terry, with fried lobster, tea-biscuits and sauce, while Vance, glancing around, and recalling what Uncle Terry had said of her, felt sure she was the cause and probable purchaser of the dainty table-ware, mod-

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ern chairs, rugs, delicate window-draperies, upright piano, and all that made the quite large room charming.

"I don't believe in no state keepin'-room," Uncle Terry said, noticing that Vance glanced around while all were being served. "I jest figgered this to be our livin' 'n' eatin'-room, 'n' the best in the house. We got a small one jest 'crost from the stairs that's fer the wimmin to sew in 'n' nap it in on the sofa, if they want, 'n' four sleepin'-rooms."

"Quite different from your wilderness log cabin," replied Vance, "but that was a most comfortable one for the kind. We enjoyed it thoroughly for almost a week."

"Wal, Lissy says that's my one fool whim,"—with a chuckle—" 'n' I guess 'twas. Howsomever, ez I've ben offered eighteen thousand fer what cost me two, the old fool's still ahead. I was mighty glad to git back 'n' smell salt air once more, 'n' hev a taste o' lobster."

"That reminds me of a joke I played on the old stage-driver this afternoon. Did you ever notice how inquisitive he is, Miss Oaks?" added Vance, anxious to draw her into conversation.

"Oh, yes," she smilingly replied. "He is positively impertinent occasionally, though I doubt

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if he realizes it. I ride with him quite often, going to Bath, and if I bring bundles back, he will ask what they contain. So the entire Cape knows when I get a new hat or dress."

"Well, I gave him a stunner; grafted him, as we used to say at college. That is, I told him a wild but plausible tale of why I was here. I didn't admit that my yarn was fact. Just hinted it, and the purport was that other business men and myself were contemplating using the Cape harbor for a lobster pound. I added all the details of what we might do, with the conclusion that we should expect to pay all landowners around the harbor a fair price for damages. Also that his share for four hundred feet would probably be a thousand dollars. I made him promise not to tell a soul."

"Wal, ye did string him wuss'n a man sellin' minin'-stock," laughed Uncle Terry, and the rest joined. "But I'll bet this island that every man at the Cape knows it by now, 'n' are all figgerin' how much damages they'll git. When old Ben finds how he was hooked it may stop his quizzin' some, 'n' larn him a lesson."

After supper, Uncle Terry drew chairs to the open fire, added a stick of fuel, passed the cigars to Vance and began to question him upon his plans. "I've ben thinkin' since you war here," he

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said reflectively, "that if ye ain't dead sure o' findin' more o' them stuns, why not start a stock company 'n' let the other feller do the riskin'. The world is full o' suckers, one born every minute, 'n' all it wants is a slick talker like yourself to sell 'em stock. I callate from sizin' ye up ye cud sell fifty thousand inside a month. The way ye fooled Uncle Ben is proof o' that!" And then Vance laughed heartily at the unique compliment.

"Well, I might," he responded still smiling, "but I've got a conscience that would bother me, cock-sure, and I just couldn't take a fool's money."

When Olivia and Aunt Lissy joined them, Vance drew from his pocket the big green tourmaline he had brought. "How would you like that surrounded by diamonds for a brooch, Miss Oaks?" he asked, handing it to her.

"Why, it's beautiful, very beautiful," she answered quietly, turning it before the firelight to catch the flashes of green light, "and I guess most ladies would rave over such a brooch. But I—I guess I wouldn't dare wear it. It would be too stunning."

"And right you are," rejoined Vance glancing at her admiringly. "In the first place you don't need any jewelry. Nature has done enough for you without it. But our city women will jump

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at anything of the sort. I expect to see nose-rings worn next, and very likely armlets and ankle-bands, like those of a Hindoo princess."

"Aren't you a bit hard in your criticism of the fashionable women of to-day?" rejoined Ollie, yet smiling as if she approved it. "Perhaps the social whirl has lost them all youthful charm, and they must make up somehow."

"They certainly *make up*," rejoined Vance, boldly. And then this exchange ceased. Vance very much wished to ask her how she enjoyed the previous Sunday's sermon in Bristol, yet dared not as yet, not knowing just where he stood in her estimation. She might, if Uncle Terry had not explained matters, consider him as a rather bold-spoken promoter here to inveigle him into some scheme, or worse yet, an impertinent fellow who had stared at her that Sunday, and set gossiping tongues wagging by inquiring who she was and where from. "Guess I'll bide my time," Vance reflected. "She's here, so am I, and that boy preacher isn't. Besides if I said anything about his sermon it must be praise and I won't praise a rival if I know it." All of which goes to show that it takes a young man many years to divine a woman's thoughts, especially those of a young and charming one.

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The next thing Vance did was a wise one. With a glance at the piano, he asked Ollie to play. "I notice your music-rack has a pile of songs in it," he added. "If that is your choice, I shall be more than pleased."

Without a word of excuse or answer, this serene and well-poised young lady arose and not even glancing at the music cabinet, sat down and played a famous symphony. Two more followed of similar tenor, but whether from Mozart, Beethoven, or some other master, Vance had not the faintest idea.

"You don't like classical music," she said after the last note, and turning quickly flashed a keen look at Vance.

"Why, how—how do you know?" he almost demanded. "But I confess that I don't."

"That's right, be honest," she laughed. "I saw it in your face—in fact, felt it before I looked." And then Vance felt more bashful than ever to find himself in the presence of one who was so much more than a simple country maid that she could read his feelings without looking.

"Sing some o' the old songs ye know, girlye," now put in Uncle Terry, and "Girlye," turning again, sang three songs of the long ago, all new to Vance, and sung as only this girl could render

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them, which fairly enthralled him. And they were "Sweet Belle Mahone," "Bonnie Eloise," and "Speed Away."

"Now 'Patter, Patter,'" Uncle Terry suggested and also for the first time in his life Vance heard that wonderfully sweet, old-time "Rain upon the Roof" song.

The rendering of that song haunted him for many months after.

"Please sing 'Coronation,'" he next asked, seeing his opening. "I heard it not long ago, by a country-church congregation, with one voice leading all the rest, and I shall never forget it."

Once more she turned, her face flushing slightly, and sang that old hymn even better than when Vance first heard her voice. But he could not see her eyes.

When the good-nights had been said and Vance was in his room once more, he sat down by one of the open windows and gazed out upon the sparkling ocean as if in a trance. The moon, almost full, spread her silvery path afar. A low murmuring wave-wash surrounded the island, to which the faint click of beach-stones was added. But Vance noticed neither silver sparkle, murmuring waves, nor clicking pebbles, for a new, strange, sweet enchantment, mingled with a heartache, was upon him.

CHAPTER VI

THE ocean's voice woke Vance early, and hearing Uncle Terry's footsteps on the piazza, he speedily dressed and joined him.

"Wal, ye're like me, up arly," Uncle Terry said, cheerily, after the "Good-mornings." "I'm goin' to take ye out pot-pullin'," he added, "right arter breakfast. Want ye to see my new boat. 'Sides we kin talk over your plans. I'm growin' interested in 'em, 'n' mebbe kin gin ye a trifle o' good advice. I know them lumberjacks, had 'em workin' fer me, 'n' they'll skin a sportsman like you all they kin. Most likely they'll demand fresh beef, spring lamb, 'n' fresh vegetables every day. 'N' the way meats are goin' up now, why, 'twill break ye."

"I shall most certainly enjoy going lobstering with you," answered Vance, hoping he might catch a half-hour alone with Ollie in the afternoon. "But you know I must leave in the morning. I've written Levi, my old guide, that I would meet him at Milton Mills Saturday night."

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"Wal, he kin wait ; 'twon't hurt him," rejoined Uncle Terry, bluntly. "Monday mornin's soon ez ye kin git away. I want to give ye a little fishin', too. Mack'rel's runnin' yit. I kin take ye to whar ye kin pull cod up till ye git tired, 'n' it'll be quite a spell 'fore ye smell salt water agin." For self-evident reasons Vance accepted.

"I shall pull over to the Cape early this morning to do some marketing," Ollie said to Vance at breakfast and smiling. "So if you want to send a message to relieve Uncle Ben, I will take it."

"No," chuckled Vance, "let him keep on counting his chickens and hugging that thousand-dollar illusion as long as possible. It's like all of them," he added smiling. "They lure us along the highway of life for months and years, perhaps ; keep us cheerful and full of hope, banish many a sorrow, and add to our courage." Ollie gave him a curious, half-defiant look, as if wishing to take up the gage of battle, and then said, hesitatingly :

"But isn't it unkind to the old man to fool him like that? He couldn't even define an illusion, much less understand what they mean. He will go on, as you say, for weeks and months, believing he will be paid a thousand dollars for nothing, only to find he was deceived by you. And he is over seventy years old !"

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"You are right ; I will retract," rejoined Vance with a nod, realizing that here was a sweet and charming girl, not one whit afraid of him, and fully capable of meeting him in any discussion. "I will tell the old fellow Monday morning it was all a joke on my part and just for fun. I guess it isn't right to deceive seventy years. They haven't many illusions left."

This fair maid had won her first battle, while Vance lost nothing by it.

At the landing, now seen for the first time in daylight by Vance, surprises met him, along with a realization of what a safe harbor meant to this storm-bound coast. The first was an elongated raft, constructed of three sets of logs well lashed together but with a chain-crossed space in the middle, and lying just across and alongside the inlet. The outer end was held in place by a heavy chain clasped around a big boulder, the inner one by a stout rope.

"My idea," explained Uncle Terry as he noticed Vance staring at it. "O' course ye see this inlet opens to sou'west ; most o' our winds are east'ard, but now 'n' then comes a sou'west blow that kicks up quite a sea. Then I bring that raft around, 'n' you'd be s'prised how much it kills the waves."

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Vance next noticed, as he continued downstairs to the float, that a new motor-boat of oak with brass trimmings lay alongside, while resting upon it were a dainty cedar yawl and a white-painted dory. Lobster-pots were stacked high upon rock-shelves beside the stairs, while above his head and midway of the inlet a double tackle of quarter-inch rope crossed it, evidently designed to moor out the big motor-boat.

"We'll get away soon ez we kin, fer the tide turns in 'bout two hours," asserted Uncle Terry, pitching a big basket of cut-up fish of all sorts into the motor-boat, and the next minute that handy craft was "chug-chugging" out to seaward of the island. Soon Uncle Terry shut off the power, seized a boat-hook, picked up a red-and-white-striped buoy as it slid alongside, tossed it astern, and hauled in many fathoms of line, until a weed-draped lobster-pot appeared. Six lobsters were clinging to the slats inside, four big and two baby ones, or "shorts," while four cunners and a dozen crabs were also caught. In two minutes, or less, Uncle Terry had pitched the six lobsters into a big basket, the cunners into another, the crabs overboard; and tying a net-bag of fresh bait to a cross-bar, shut the pot's long slat door, and slid it overboard. Next he opened two

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stop-cocks, gave his steering-wheel a couple of whirls, and away they sped again.

"Easy way o' gittin' 'round," he asserted, glancing ahead, then to seaward, "'n' beats pullin' a dory by forty miles to one. We 'ain't but jest begun to take comfort livin'," he added, giving his wheel a sharp turn, "'n' I callate every day I was born all o' fifty years too soon. When I kept the lighthouse I drew thirty a month, which jest about made ends meet. Likewise drove stage up the island once a day (they have to make two trips now or wait). I uster set pots besides, 'n' pullin' a dory with a middlin' heavy sea on ten to fifteen miles wa'n't no joke. Six cents a pound was all lobsters fetched then; now it's sixteen. But we uster ketch six then to one now, so it 'bout evens up."

For three hours Vance sat in the cushioned stern-seat, lazily smoking, watching the sea-gulls, the white-capped waves, and this vigorous old man, hardy still, in spite of his many years. He thought, too, of this fisherman's island home, the white-haired old lady who seldom spoke, but watched Uncle Terry's every need; and, most of all, Vance thought of this beautiful girl they had adopted, and how she, too, not only waited upon Uncle Terry, but was hostess as well. Although

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she possessed the poise, keenness of mind, and spirit of twenty-five, yet she looked a simply-garbed and modest island-girl, withal. Another thought came to Vance while he watched this tender-hearted, humorous old lobster-catcher; and that was that he, himself, had in one short week come to the conclusion that he would win this fair maid, if in his power, and carry her away. And what of Uncle Terry then and his need of her for "sunshine," as he put it? "It's a selfish world," mused Vance now, "and each man lives for himself. I came here on a selfish errand, next saw a prize among girls, and mean to rob the old man of her. How would I feel if positions were reversed?"

Vance now noticed that this boat, which bore the name *Telly* on her stern, was rounding the north side of the island, and within two minutes it was made fast to the outside of a double wire-screened enclosure, shaped like a horseshoe, including points of rocks.

"It's my pound," declared Uncle Terry, now tossing lobsters into it over the screen and counting as he did so. And so engrossed was Vance in holding the boat back from chafing against the screen that he failed to notice a small cedar yawl approach until Ollie shipped her oars and grasped the big boat.

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"Had good luck?" she queried, with a cool nod at Vance. "I was almost back from the Cape when I saw you heading in, and pulled up to meet you."

"Wal, it's sixty-nine," answered Uncle Terry, "with shorts fer two messes. Purty poor catch fer twenty pots. Hello, girlye," he added, glancing into her boat with stern full of bundles. "Hitch on, 'n' I'll tow ye down."

"No, thank you," came the response. "You nearly swamped me once, and I'd rather pull down."

"Go slower this time," he rejoined, but now the girl was away and pulling with long, slow strokes, each oar feathered like the work of a trained oarsman, as Vance noticed. She entered the inlet close behind the big boat. Vance, now on the float, grasped her yawl. She turned and passed him the bundles, then hopped out as light as a bird, grasped its bow and drew it half-way up on the float ere Vance could aid her.

"I'm self-helpful, you see," she said, smiling, noticing his look of chagrin, "besides, I'm in a hurry," and filling her arms with bundles while Vance did the same, the two hastened homeward without a word except a "Thank you" from her, as Vance piled his load upon the dining-table.

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Then, conscious that he was one too many, he strolled back to the landing.

"We'll start right arter dinner," Uncle Terry then announced. "'N' I'll run over to Fisherman's Sound, ez the wind's west'rd."

"Perhaps Miss Oaks would like to join us," responded Vance, and then Uncle Terry smiled at this first sign of interest. But Ollie was wise, and politely declined. Vance, however, enjoyed the usually dull sport of cod-fishing, mainly from the peculiar way they fished by allowing the boat to drift, also because of the great variety of fish caught. There were cod of all sizes, big cunners, hake, haddock, dog-fish, skates, sculpins, toad-fish, and finally a big sea-bullhead, with teeth like a cat, and weighing fully five pounds. So fierce was this queer fish, jumping and snapping at everything, that even Uncle Terry did not dare unhook it, until he had quieted it by a blow from his boat-hook. "Thar's stranger fish in the sea than ever git caught," he announced; then after two big baskets had been filled, the run back to his pound was made. Here Vance watched him transfer their catch to his dory, anchored just outside, fasten that craft's anchor-line to the big boat, after which both jumped into the dory and pulled ashore. And now Vance saw a unique sight, for



"HAD GOOD LUCK!" — Page 87.

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as Uncle Terry began chopping fish of all sorts into small pieces, then tossing them into the pound, lobsters rose to the surface and began a fighting scramble for them. Lobsters had always seemed to him helpless creatures, able only to use their claws. Now they became a few hundred active fighters, swimming rapidly, snapping at and seizing with their claws bits of fish, or one another, in sharp combat for the food, in topsy-turvy conflict.

"Vicious, ain't they?" Uncle Terry exclaimed, pausing to watch the splashing warfare. "Got to feed 'em, too, or they'll kill 'n' eat one 'nother wuss'n cannibals. Ugly-lookin', too, 'n' I've allus callated the fust man who ever thought o' eatin' one must 'a' ben a starvin' Injun. Now I sold 'em last summer fer twenty cents a pound."

At tea, Ollie informed Vance that the old stage-driver had disclosed his wonderful plan to all the Cape folks. "A few asked me eagerly when working on it would begin," she added, "and if Uncle Terry was one of the company. You see, easy money to poor people is like liquor. I'd advise you to walk around the village when you depart."

That evening Vance managed to draw the elusive Ollie into a discussion of his favorite subject, illusions, that nearly excited both of them.

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"I expected our inquisitive friend, Uncle Ben, would tell everybody in spite of his promise," he began, "and now that he has, the outcome will be his own."

"Well, what do you expect from seventy years?" asked Ollie. "I've even known younger men who couldn't keep a secret."

"Any ladies?" inquired Vance, suavely.

"Yes, dozens of them, in fact most of our sex," she returned boldly. "I wouldn't trust any woman with a real secret. I've learned better. I would trust a few men; not more than one in a hundred, however." And then Vance realized that she was ready for battle.

"I'm going to relieve our inquisitive friend, Monday morning, as I said," he answered. "Would you advise me to remind him of his broken promise?"

"For what good? He is an old dotard, and more to be pitied. While I consider him impertinent, I usually tell him, and sometimes show him what I have bought, because it seems to please him so much. He thinks I am a winged angel for it. An illusion, of course."

"So was mine, and that would have kept him happy for months."

"But it had a sting in it; his abject humiliation,

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when he learns the truth, and to be sneered at for being duped."

"You don't believe in illusions, I fancy," rejoined Vance, wondering if it would be safe to mention the love illusion or any one beyond.

"Why, yes, all of them are wise and best for us up to a certain age. Contain most of our happiness, in fact. What would our childhood be without them? Merely a dull round of eating, sleeping, and studying, with work and play mixed in. But give a child something he can't understand, a fairy-land peopled by all sorts of mystic genii, a rainbow hiding a pot of gold; and his mind grows fast. Give a lad 'Robinson Crusoe,' 'Treasure Island,' or 'Cudjo's Cave,' and you have given him charming illusions. Give a maid a sweet simple love-story and you have done the same for her."

"But why the love-story to the maid and not the lad?"

"Why, the lad never feels that illusion until it becomes a reality, I guess," she answered hesitatingly, "while to the maid who began mothering dolls while in short dresses,—well, I am sure the love illusion comes more easily, more naturally and is also more pathetic when it fades."

"And how about the adult illusion, or real

love? Would you also class that among our illusions?"

"Why, yes,—from observation," after a pause. "I never experienced it, and hope I never shall. Believing it to be an illusion, I should dread the awakening. Do you believe in it,—as an illusion?" she added, as if meaning to punish him for his persistent questioning.

"Why, certainly, and the most delightful pipe-dream of them all. But from the best of my observation, its outcome is only a contented and loyal friendship between man and wife. And this only among those who lead the simple life. Among fashionable people there is no illusion. Merely a game of barter, buy and sell."

"But how about our future life in which even the wisest are keenly interested? Do you class that among your illusions?"

Vance hesitated, for this was the very point he had been leading up to, while still unaware of her convictions. He also recalled on the instant the half-sad look on her face, when that boy preacher closed his sermon with a practical assurance that the Golden City was only an illusion.

"That is a question I'd rather not answer now," he finally responded with grave firmness. "One's faith in God and hope of a future life are all his

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own, all his sheet-anchor in storm or shine, in joy or sorrow; and most of all when the end of life draws near. So, Miss Oaks, with all due respect to you, I must decline to answer. My belief is that if any one finds or feels satisfaction in any faith or any hope, no one else had the moral right even to hint it to be an illusion. I never have done so, and I'd rather not begin now." And then Vance saw on this girl's face the same momentary look of sadness as once before.

No more was said by her in answer. She looked neither at Vance or Uncle Terry. Only at the slowly dying fire, as if that were her only consolation now. And Vance, watching her meditative face for one long moment, felt sure he had uttered words that had better been left unspoken. For a full five minutes the tall clock in one corner kept repeating its slow, solemn, "Tick-tock" message. Then Uncle Terry, as if to relieve the silence, spoke first.

"Guess the All-Wise Maker never meant us to peep into the futur', leastwise none ever did 'n' told the tale. We all hev hope, a few hev both faith 'n' hope, 'n' I say let 'em keep it, same ez ye do, Mr. Harper. Ez fer the harp 'n' halo business, let 'em both go fer stock-in-trade to them ez has faith."

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Then as the clock chimed ten, Vance made one slight request of the girl who had so battled with him. "Please, Miss Oaks," he said, "won't you sing that patter-of-the-rain song for me again? I know you must be tired after our long discussion, so I won't ask for more."

And sing it she did, without hesitation or excuse, as was her way ; and into it she wove all the pathos of loneliness, of heart-hunger, of long-ago illusions, now faded, when mother came to kiss her boy that slumbered while rain pattered upon the roof above him. More than that, when the last chorus came, she so dropped her voice and rapidly touched minor keys as to produce an almost perfect imitation of the pattering rain.

"I'm in for it, and I'd like to tell her so before I leave," Vance said to himself while he watched the moonlit ocean and enjoyed a few whiffs from his pipe before retiring. And somehow, just then, all the pathos of life, all its vanishing hopes, all its fading illusions, seemed whispering to him in the low monotone of the near-by ocean.

CHAPTER VII

A MATURE man almost instantly sees the first sign of a woman's interest in him, be it real or affected. A young man is more obtuse, and having greater conceit, often imagines it. With Vance, it would probably be the same, though having less egotism, he would be less liable to be deceived. So far, with this unusual young lady, he had not only failed to detect the first sign of interest, but rather the opposite, as if her heart were interested elsewhere. From occult reasoning, he decided that it must have that eloquent young minister for its object.

When Saturday afternoon came, and Vance, after a stroll over the island, found her alone on the piazza reading, it seemed an opportune chance for private conversation.

"May I ask you to lay aside the woes of your fair heroine and take a short walk with me?" he asked. "I have an apology to make you."

She complied without a word, and as soon as they started, Vance began. "Last Sunday while attending church in a little country village with my

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best friend, Professor Moss of H — College, I caught sight of a rare face, so much so to me that I couldn't resist glancing at it many times. Later on in the evening I also made bold to ask the Professor's niece who the lady was, and where from. I thus heard your name and that you came from somewhere on the Maine coast and were a teacher, spending your vacation in Bristol. Now I wish to apologize. I would assure you that when I found you here I felt like gasping."

"No apology was necessary," she returned, smiling. "I felt sure you were a gentleman, else you wouldn't have been in church. Later, I heard who you were from Miss Marlowe, and an outline of your history."

"Well, my history isn't much. Just that of an ordinary college fellow with a rich father, brought up in luxury, and expecting to inherit a comfortable fortune, only to get left. In my case I was legally robbed of it by a designing woman. Now as I was left with a board-room-and-clothing annuity, I am going to fight my own life battle and fight hard. About as I did once on our football team, when the score stood ten to four against us in the last five minutes of play. And we won out, too!" he added proudly. "No young man who is endowed with good health and a good educa-

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tion has any moral right to whimper over any ill luck. If he does, he is a coward. I have heard bad luck comes in sets of threes, like ocean waves. I've had two cracks, one in the city, and the next when a wilderness thief stole our find of tourmalines. I expect a third, and have the courage to meet it. And there you are ! ”

“ I hope you are not superstitious, for that I believe is an element of weakness in a man. And it won't help you in going into the woods as you are planning.”

“ But most men are, especially after they have had two doses of bad luck in quick succession. I am not so in the usual acceptance of the word, believing as I do that all superstitions have come down to us, or rather up, from primitive man, who lived in continual fear through ignorance of Nature's laws. I always sneer at the spilling of salt, and Friday business, and all the long list of petty ones left us.” Then wishing to hear this girl talk, he added, “ Are you not a wee bit superstitious yourself? Most ladies are.”

“ Why, yes and no,” she hesitated. “ I believe in cause and effect, and in evolution and compensation. I also think as you do that most superstitions have come up to us from ignorant man. Where I may not agree with you is in

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believing that Christianity, with its spiritual God in the place of gross idols, or the later gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus, has done much to eliminate superstition."

Vance stared in astonishment at this pretty island-girl, who could speak so glibly of evolution, compensation, Christian and Pagan history, as if they were text-books with her.

"I will admit," she added, looking dreamily away over the wide, white-capped ocean, "that I always think of bad luck when I happen to see the new moon over my left shoulder, spill salt, drop a fork, or start away on Friday. I have often watched for any ill luck to myself for an entire month after seeing the new moon on the left. In fact, I have looked at it so on purpose and then watched to test that foolish belief." Then Vance, admiring this modestly-spoken, keen-witted and well-educated girl more than ever, asked a bolder question.

"How is it, Miss Oaks, that you who look scarcely eighteen and were, I suppose, born and educated in this little fishing-village, are so well informed in ancient history, and so well-read in evolution and compensation? Where did you find the books?"

"Oh, they are plenty," she answered. "We have quite a little library at the Cape, mostly

classic works, with some history. As for the deeper ones, like Spencer, Darwin, Emerson, Draper, and those, why, I obtained them at Bath where they have a splendid library. All that is necessary is the taste and time for such reading, and I enjoy it."

"Well, you are a wonder for your age," rejoined Vance, now daring to speak thus, and wishing he could look into her eyes just then. "I was surprised when I found you here, but I am astounded now to meet a young lady who can cope with a well-read man on any subject. I should not be more surprised at finding the Queen of England residing on this island."

"Don't flatter me, please," turning to him and smiling, "for while I think you are sincere, all flattery is dangerous. As some one says 'the louder a man praises me, the faster I count my spoons,' and while I've no spoons, I believe praise kills ambition."

"But you must have been flattered by many young men. They couldn't help it if they dared. If not, they were dolts."

"Oh, of course," with a far-away look, "and I always know the reason. No man gains in my estimation by flattering me, for I inevitably recall the old saw, 'Praise to the face is open disgrace.'"

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"But how can a man show his appreciation of you without words that mean praise? Must he be dumb and only stare at you?"

"By no means do I want him to be dumb," she laughed, "for then I can't combat him. But all the praise necessary can be uttered by implication. If a man likes my society, he will seek it. If he enjoys my conversation, he will ask me questions. If my singing is pleasing, he will urge me to sing. As for personal appearance, my mirror will always tell me good or ill-report. I also know I am blessed by youth and good health, therefore, all mention of my face is needless."

"But you must soon have a lover. If so, and he praises you, what will you do, smite him?"

"Only as I am smiting you, by words. But I am not in immediate danger of that. Most men fall in love with the clinging, confiding, praise-loving type of girl. Not necessarily stupid, but the ones who look up to man as the superior creature. And I can't blame men for so selecting mates. They all love praise with rare exceptions, and must feel they are admired by fiancée or wife. Most men worth calling such, while selfish in a way, still have a streak of nobility in them. They enjoy making the wife and family happy. At least, that is my observation of men. Beyond

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that, few men want a strong-minded wife with set opinions. Neither does a 'bookish' one please the average man with mind absorbed in business. He wants rest and petting, not argument, when he comes home from the grind of money-making."

"Well, in a way, I think you are right, especially so in your last few assertions. I do not believe, however, that the average man of brains will always be pleased by a clinging wife. Marriage is a life contract, or should be, and when the sweet illusion of love vanishes, as it inevitably will, there must be some compatibility of thought or the tender after friendship will fail. And a home without that charm is simply hell, if you will excuse the word. Or it is like two Kilkenny cats. Therefore, I must differ with you and say a man needs a wife who can combat him in argument. Also wise enough to see his failings and gently brush them away; devoted enough to accept him as he is and improve him if she can, and tender enough to caress and sympathize with him when the world kicks him."

"But how few men can be so handled," she returned instantly. "I admire a brave, strong, manly man very much. Especially so if he has an undercurrent of tenderness, like Uncle Terry."

I wouldn't mind if he swore now and then. He could leave his boots in the sitting-room corner, his coat on a dining-room chair, his hat on the piano, if he were only tender and thoughtful of me. But not one man in a thousand can stand making over as you infer. He might think to hang his hat and coat in the hall once or twice, after being reminded that was the place. But after about the fifth reminder he would retain a grouch for an hour after."

"And what would you do then?"

"Why, hang them in their place without a word, after one or two reminders. That is, if he still showed any tender friendship for me. If not, I think I would pack my belongings and face the world alone." And then Vance, looking seaward for a long moment, recalled how neither his mother nor Myra had ever so outlined what a home should be. He thought, however, of his mother gently dominating his easy-going father and himself in youth. How patient she was even in firmness, how many little things, little needs, little failings she anticipated for him! Then he wondered for the hundredth time how his father could so have fallen under the ban of a designing woman two years after his mother's death, and worse yet, have practically disinherited him. And just then the

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recollection of his mother, added perhaps to the ocean's monotone, brought a mist to his eyes.

"I hope I haven't hurt you by my cynicism," next came in low voice from his companion not five feet away.

"Oh, no, no," he responded earnestly, facing around and winking rapidly. "Only you set me thinking of my mother and how much I lost six years ago. I was only eighteen then. I think no man ever appreciates his mother until he has grown to manhood with thought of a home for himself."

"Or else while he is enduring a Kilkenny-cat life with a mismated wife, who nags him early, late, and often. Marriage is a beautiful beatitude in prospection," Ollie continued, philosophically. "That is, taken from my distant observations. But when I have drawn nearer, seen the real, the inner home life with all its sordid selfishness, I have grown cynical. I know I should worship a real brave, strong man, while the illusion lasted. Would be patient and tender with him after the mirage vanished, that is, if he retained any tenderness. But if that also faded away, I should feel that God alone could help me."

She spoke earnestly, candidly, courageously, as if this young man had now risen above sex level

with her and could be trusted. "I know," she continued in the same confiding tone, "that the love illusion is bound to come to us all sooner or later, like measles or other childhood ailments. I believe also that home and wifehood were fore-ordained by our Wise Creator, and that no woman's life is complete unless she becomes the wife of some good man. I do not fear an old maid's fate ; she is at least mistress of herself. But from my observation of humanity at large, the many homes I have glanced into, what fashionable life and court records have disclosed to me, I feel that every young woman is taking her life happiness in hand, shutting her eyes, and jumping into an unknown realm, by saying 'yes' to any man. Worse than that, I have also noticed that this illusion so distracts reason that each of the victims sees only the good points of the other, magnified tenfold or more, with all the evil ones practically banished."

Vance smiled, but refrained from asking what would become of humanity if it were not for this same deceptive illusion. "I have one more question or favor to ask," he said instead, "and that is, will you permit me to write you from the woods, and will you answer? I will also promise to leave all vexatious illusions out of my letters, only just

social chats on paper. As my sole companions will be one fairly intelligent guide, wood-wise only, and four lumberjacks, you can see what a boon letters from you will be."

"Why, yes, I am willing," she replied, "and your letters will be enjoyed, for I have a keen admiration for the wilderness. Please tell me of the life there, even if it's dull and sordid to you. It must have some romance and some risk worth the telling. I can't promise you long answers, however. Life at the Cape is a dull monotony. My home life is just what you see it, I am deeply absorbed in my pupils, so you see how it is." And then both rose as if by mutual consent, and went over where Uncle Terry was repairing pots. And Vance walked upon air.

Sunday morning also brought him another consolation, for after breakfast Uncle Terry said, "I've got to take my folks over to the Cape, 'n' o' course we want ye to go 'long. Ollie, ye see, sings fer the church folks. They think her pay fer teachin' sorter includes that. Lissy kinder likes to look the new bonnets over 'n' hear what's goin' on, while I, ez the preachin' is sorter gone by, ginerally walk 'round or find somebody to talk with till meetin's over. It's only forenoons with Sabbath-school jest arter." And then Vance felt

luck was coming his way for he was at least to appear as Uncle Terry's guest. He helped Aunt Lissy down the stairs and into the big boat, gave a hand to Ollie as she leaped lightly in, and helped both out as gallantly, when the Cape harbor wharf was reached. Uncle Terry also kept with his family, then leading to their usual pew, while Ollie in the same light grey dress, gloves, and hat, kept on to one corner where stood a small church organ. Vance next glanced around to meet many faces turned to him, and observed that the church had no choir gallery facing the pulpit as in Bristol ; likewise that the preacher was tall, lanky, and white-haired, which was more pleasing.

The services were much the same, with three hymns instead of two, and each sung by the congregation, with Ollie leading. The sermon resembled the parson, who read it in quavering voice, and when the long-handled boxes came around, Vance dropped a two-dollar bill on top of the thin garnering of pennies and dimes, with a few quarters. Uncle Terry put in a half-dollar, the benediction was uttered, and then Uncle Terry and Vance joined most of the departing ones.

"It takes money to make meetin's go," the former announced as they started to stroll over to

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the lighthouse to await Aunt Lissy and Ollie. "They're poor here ; poorer'n church-mice. That is, most o' the go-to-meetin' ones. They pay the parson four hundred, 'n' have hard work to raise it. The meetin'-house hain't been shingled for ten years. The pew-cushions are in rags, ez ye mebbe noticed, but the fifty, or per'aps seventy-five, grown-ups, who make the congregation, are the best in the town. They all fear God 'n' try to do his biddin'. Thar's ben talk o' buildin' a new church, however. I 'lowed I'd gin two hundred toward it, but guess I'll never be called on." Thus was the Cape's religious life and history told.

That afternoon Ollie and Vance had another pleasant exchange in easy-chairs on the piazza, while the two old folks napped. "You must pardon a personal question, Miss Oaks," he began, "but isn't it quite risky at times for you to row back and forth to teach school at the Cape? Besides, you must get soaked in your cockle-shell boat when heavy seas are running. With a winter storm on you couldn't cross anyway."

"Oh, Uncle Terry fetches and carries me in his big boat when it is blowing hard, and when a gale is on I stay ashore. You see, we have a telephone ; it is back of the hall door, so perhaps

you did not notice it, and by going to the village store, I can call up my home at any time."

"I—I suppose you teach school more to pass the time than for pay," Vance cautiously asked.

A merry laugh came in response.

"By no means, but why didn't you ask if I needed the money? I read the question in your thoughts. Besides, we have passed to the stage of more personal questions than that. You needn't be afraid of me. I have assured you that I believed you a gentleman. I have talked to you more plainly than any one I ever met before. Also discussed questions I would not care to discuss with one man in a hundred. Is not that implication enough to allow so simple a question as you wanted to ask?"

"But I would not risk your regarding me as impertinent and like Uncle Ben."

"Well, then, my dear sir, I teach school, first because it gives me keen enjoyment to watch and guide young minds. Next for the pay that gives me a feeling of independence. I was left an orphan, homeless and practically destitute, twelve years ago. I was taken in, so to speak, by our mutual friend, Uncle Ben, who has a half-crippled wife and two grandchildren on his hands. For my keep and few clothes I became their servant.

Then Uncle Terry came back, built his new house, and then offered to adopt me, if I would accept and take care of him and Aunt Lissy. As I was but twelve, and practically a town charge—well, I will leave it to you to guess my answer, or all the answer an orphan minor could give. He sent me away to school for four years, out of his big, kind heart, when my duty was with him and Aunt Lissy, let me have my own way when I wanted to teach, and the only thing he ever scolds me for is when I use my own money to buy a new frock or hat. Do you wonder I love him, and never wish to leave him while he lives?" And then a new obstacle, a new quietus to the faint hope Vance now had of winning this peerless maid, cast its shadow on his face. So fearful, however, was he that this keen-eyed girl would fathom his thought, that he excused himself at once to go up to his own room to obtain a cigar.

"Life is full of cross-purposes, selfish and foolish actions, heart-losses and the bitter need of money," he said on his return. "The last was recalled to me after looking over your little church and what Uncle Terry told me. In a way, I am feeling there is ample reason for socialism in this country. The great trusts that stifle all competition, the growing power of money, the rich getting richer,

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the poor poorer, are all arguments in favor of that seemingly impossible outcome in government."

"I have read and observed how trusts stifle competition, how arrogant labor unions are, and how wealth says, 'I am boss.' Why, only last July a big yacht belonging, so I heard, to that young Vanderbilt who renounced his allegiance to this country, ran in back of our island and sent a boat ashore for lobsters. Uncle Terry was away pulling pots, so I told the smart Alec who called that he would have to wait. 'But cawn't ye get them for me, yerself?' he demanded. 'I can, but I won't,' I snapped back. 'But we cawn't wait, ye know,' he persisted. 'You will wait or get no lobsters,' I answered, quite mad now, and then he went away muttering something about 'the dang sassy jade.' I pulled out to meet Uncle Terry in a hurry and told him what had happened. 'I'll fix him,' he said, chuckling, 'so keep cool.' I hitched on, and we ran back to the big yacht. 'Come ashore with me if ye want lobster, 'n' lively, too,' Uncle Terry said to this cockney, and he followed us to the pound. When the hundred pounds he called for were dumped into his boat, he asked how much. 'Jest an even fifty dollars,' Uncle Terry said, and it was paid after an ugly look."

"Got even, didn't you?" laughed Vance. "But the idea of his so insulting you! Wish I'd been here. He would have heard a few words he would have remembered."

"Well, it was all a part of the arrogance of money," rejoined Ollie.

That evening also Vance had a little reason to feel that he had at least made friends with this bright girl, for she seemed to drop her cool politeness and chat as with an old friend. They strolled up to the head of the island, at her suggestion, to see how a curved rock sent a jet of spray high in air from each billow, how it glistened in the moonlight, and finally Ollie sang a few *new* old songs without request. And so it came about that Vance in departing felt that he had won the first step in her good opinion.

When landed at the Cape wharf the next morning, Uncle Terry held out his hand. "Good-bye, 'n' good luck to ye," he said, smiling. "Come 'n' see us when ye kin. The latch-string's allus out."

When Ollie's schoolhouse was next reached, she, too, offered her hand. "Good-bye, good luck, and may you find bushels of tourmalines," she said.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN school closed that first Monday afternoon, there came a letter to Ollie written in bold masculine hand and postmarked "Bristol," that awoke a sense of dread in her.

"DEAR MISS OAKS," it began, "I missed your sweet face and voice to-day far more than you can realize. Somehow, as I looked over my small audience, half-filling the church, some of the older faces seemed bidding defiance to me. Most looked listless, as if expecting to be bored, while, as an added hint of lacking interest, the contribution-plates brought in mostly pennies and dimes. I do not speak of that meaning money-giving to be a measure of religious interest. And yet, in a way, it is. The entire church also seemed more faded and old. The bare windows with cobwebs in the corners annoyed me. The faded choir-gallery curtains and patched pew-cushions bespoke poverty. I have tried my best for eight months now to awaken new life in the church, and a more earnest interest in church work, but it appears that I have failed. I understand, also, that many are not satisfied with me, that I am too

liberal in my sermons, almost heretical, in fact. This of course among the older members.

"But I must not bore you with my troubles. Perhaps you have some of your own. Only, meeting you as I did, the walks, the golfing, and best of all, your face and voice in church, have given me inspiration and courage.

"Trusting that my letter will be received in the same spirit as written, and that you may find time to answer, I remain,

"Faithfully yours,

"HOWARD WILLIAMS."

And then after reading this very polite and clerical letter, Ollie sighed, put it into her bag, and strolled down to the rickety old wharf, to await Uncle Terry. Here she reread the missive carefully, then glanced out to her island home.

"Poor boy," she said musingly. "He has an impossible task ahead of him. To make over the set opinions and creeds of that little old-fashioned congregation is impossible. I told him so, frankly, but he has the courage of his convictions and would not believe me. Now to complicate his troubles, I guess he is falling in love with me. His letter reads that way. And he expects me to answer it and give him more courage and my sympathy. Also, in due time, my love, I imagine. And I've just promised to correspond with another bold man." Then came consideration as

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to whether she would better answer this letter or not.

"He was such a nice boy, so refined in his ways, so earnest in his work, and so grateful for a word from me, I hate to hurt his feelings. I suppose I really ought to answer his letter, anyway." Then she put it back into her bag.

Soon after Uncle Terry slid into the harbor with his big boat, Ollie jumped aboard and away they sped for the island.

"Wal, girlie," he questioned as soon as they were off, "how'd ye like our minin' friend? Middlin' good talker, ain't he, 'n' believes in himself, which is a good sign."

"How did you like him, Uncle?" she answered, Yankee-like; "you saw more of him than I did."

"Oh, he's all right. Got plenty o' grit, knows it's 'pull, devil, pull, baker,' with him now, 'n' I callate his bein' cut off with jest a bare livin'll be the makin' on him. It ginerally is o' most young men. It's mostly the gold-spoon chaps that go to the bad. 'N' he's a free thinker, too, no moss on his back. All in all, I like him.

"'N' he's kinder started feelin' sweet toward you, girlie," he added after a pause, and smiling at her. "S'pose he couldn't help that. I couldn't, I know, if I war twenty-one."

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That night, in the seclusion of her room, Ollie once more read the young preacher's letter.

"I guess I must answer this one," she said to herself, softly. "I can't hurt his feelings. But if he writes more and grows sentimental, that's the end."

Some one has aptly said that pity is a sure forerunner of love, and so it was that if this earnest, intellectual young preacher could have read the thoughts of Ollie just now, it would have given him added courage.

CHAPTER IX

SOME men begin a long, hard, uncomfortable and uncertain task like the boy after the woodchuck, with the parson coming to dinner and no meat in the house. Others go about it with hesitation, fear, and trembling. Vance started in on his like the boy.

At Milton Mills he found Levi and Jean both awaiting him with another stout lumberman by name of Long John, and a cook, or rather a cookee, who answered to the cognomen of "Pip," short for Pepon Marcotte. Levi, acting under instructions, had bought two tents, a list of supplies, portable cook-stove, and many necessities for life in the woods. Also obtained an option upon two pairs of stout horses. Vance made a selection of one pair, added the needful tools for timber-cutting and road-building, with many other items, and early the next morning with a big farm-wagon well loaded, started up a seldom-used road, extending eight miles and ending at the cabin of an Irishman by the name of Larry Connigan. Beyond this for four miles more was open pasture

and scrub undergrowth, to the foot of the first short rapids. Levi and Jean with loaded canoes had taken the river course.

The morn was fair and the start auspicious. By noon, when a halt was made for a hasty lunch, mare-tail clouds were scudding across the sky.

"Ze rain he come by night," Long John, or John, as usually called, declared. "It ees time for ze line-storm, too." As John was half French and half Indian, with keen, coal-black eyes, Vance felt that he predicted rightly. And so he had, for when the foot of the first rapids was reached and Levi and Jean, arriving two hours earlier, were met, a fine mist was falling. Levi, both wood-wise and storm-wise, had, with the aid of Jean, selected a camp-site, cleared it from undergrowth, and cut a big pile of spruce boughs, besides finding time to catch a dozen trout below the rapids.

There was a hustle now to set the tents up, tether the two tired horses under one, put the cook-stove up under a bough-and-bark shelter, and stow all boxes of stores, half-barrels of flour, and a dozen hams inside the big tent they were to occupy. It was pitch-dark by this time, the rain falling fast, and almost eight o'clock by the time Levi and Pip had supper for all spread upon boxes within the tent. It was a typical backwoods one

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of ham and eggs, boiled potatoes, hardtack and coffee, with a pan of fried trout added. "Draw up, boys," Vance directed; "from now on we eat and work together without ceremony." And then they squatted upon boxes, rolls of blankets, anything to sit upon, with two dim camp-candles to light the banquet board, each serving himself, while Pip filled tin cups with excellent coffee.

"I wish Ollie could peep in here," Vance thought while holding a small well-browned trout by its head, and thus eating it. With that backwoods supper eaten, came pipes and a long discourse between Vance and Levi as to how soon they would be able to cut a narrow roadway through almost two miles of mingled timber and scrub growth; also in regard to keeping five men and two horses supplied with food from the nearest settlement, Milton Mills.

"I shall go down Friday, and then by rail to Fort Kent on business," Vance next informed him, "and will make arrangements for stores to be sent us by bateau as needed. And then, before the river freezes over, have a winter supply taken to Uncle Terry's cabin."

With morning came only fitful showers, with almost a tornado of wind, sweeping the brown and yellow leaves through the forest. Vance jointed



WITH TWO DIM CAMP-CANDLES TO LIGHT THE BANQUET BOARD.
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his rod, adjusted a cast of flies, and while breakfast was cooking, betook himself to the foot of the rapids, landing-net in hand. A half-hour of keen sport and goodly string of small trout rewarded him and added relish to more ham and eggs. And then, as neither rain, tornado, driving snow, nor bitter cold is heeded by lumbermen, this little band now began their work. The axes rang in steady rhythm above the roar of the tornado. The crash of falling trees followed, and after the trees were cut from one section they were rolled or drawn aside. When a gully was reached, these logs, with more added, were used for a rude corduroy bridge. The undergrowth was cut away and pushed aside, and so while the rapids kept up a merry song, while the tornado moaned and roared through the forest, while tall trees bent, creaked, almost screamed, before the gale, the axes still kept up their steady ring and the trees kept falling. And thus began that hard fight to open a way into the wilderness.

When Friday came, though Vance was scarcely conscious of what day it was, he packed his suitcase, left the camp and work in charge of Levi, launched a canoe and started for Milton Mills, twelve miles away. Here by hired conveyances (the daily stage leaving at early morn) he jour-

neyed twenty miles more to Grindstone and the shelter of a small hotel. That night also he wrote two letters, one to the Professor, the other to a person needless to name.

To the Professor he said :—"The battle is on, the chips flying, and we are spending money at the rate of over twenty dollars a day. Bought horses and outfit at Milton Mills ; cost of same over four hundred. Leave here for Fort Kent in A. M. to look up the record of Peg-leg and trail him, if possible. Love to Myra."

What he said to Ollie need not be specified. Suffice it to say that his missive covered ten pages of hotel stationery, without one hint of love.

Illusions were discussed that day, however, between Vance and a solemn-visaged gentleman in clerical garb during the tedious ten-hour ride to Fort Kent and in an almost acrid manner. As usual in September, the two-car train was almost packed with lumberjacks on their way to the woods, most of them well primed with "split," and all hilarious. Vance, finding the smoking-car impossible, went to the other to find the only vacant half-seat was beside this gentleman. Of course he took it with a polite, "Excuse me, sir," and inevitably conversation soon started.

"It is disgusting to me, sir," the man in clerical

garb began, "to be forced to ride with such cattle as these. They are merely human brutes, not even cattle, for they would not drink the vile stuff these do."

"True enough," rejoined Vance, "and equally disgusting to me. But they don't realize it, nor would they care if they did."

"Brutes, brutes, merely brutes," replied the austere man, "and it is liquor that has made them such. They should be transported in a cattle-car and not be an offence to decent people."

"I agree with you," responded Vance, who had grown accustomed to lumberjacks. "But these fellows have eight months of the hardest work and privation in the woods ahead of them, so we must excuse them for one day of rum-bought illusions. Most of them now imagine they own this railroad."

"But such brutes have no illusions, sir, only carnal instinct, sir, and without soul!" And then Vance realized that he was beside a dogmatic man, of refinement, however, and probably a clergyman. "You do not believe in illusions, I infer?" he queried, gently.

"No, sir, not at all, except it be our childhood ones from story-books. The mature mind should have no illusions, sir! Only the desire for honest work and faith in God."

“But allowing that, are not all our lives one succession of illusions from childhood onward? Are not love and marriage an illusion, the wish for fame, power, love of money, all ambition, in fact, illusions to lure us onward and to keep up our courage? Are not all pagan and idolatrous religions merely illusions? Are not the Indians’ Happy Hunting Grounds an illusion?”

“Why no, sir, I do not so consider them. What you speak of as illusions I consider the workings of our souls to prepare us for a better life.”

“But you don’t believe the pagan’s or Indians’ belief a true one?”

“No, sir ; only ignorant superstition.”

“Will you kindly define superstition?”

“Superstition, sir, is ignorance of the facts ; a belief in falsehoods, things unseen but believed in.”

“What is that more than the child’s mind, who accepts Santa Claus as a fact?”

“Nothing at all, sir ; both are alike and the conclusion of undeveloped minds.”

“And are not both illusions?”

“You can call them such ; yes, I will admit they are.”

“Then you admit the Indian’s heaven, as he has never seen it, is an illusion to him?”

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"Yes, sir, only the superstition of an ignorant savage."

"And so I assume you class the ancient Egyptians' belief, they who were wise enough to study and record planetary laws, to invent machinery, the equal of some of ours?"

"Yes, sir ; they were pagans, believing in idols."

"And what of the sun-worshippers, the long-buried nations of Central and South America, who, in building pyramids, moved blocks of granite so enormous that we to-day have little realization of the methods employed in the application of so vast a power. Were they ignorant savages?"

"Probably ; since they worshipped the sun and made human sacrifices in so doing."

"But the Egyptians and Aztecs had brains almost the equal of our own, you must admit."

"Yes, sir, in some ways, not in others. They had no conception of the true God we worship, or of the future home for the elect."

"But those Indians and Egyptians all had a god they worshipped and a well-defined heaven, both of which you admit were false, illusions in fact?"

"Yes, sir, I allow that I so admitted," rejoined the austere man, now turning and glancing at Vance as at a heretic who deserved burning.

"But what are you coming at with your line of reasoning, sir?" he continued sharply. "Are you an infidel or atheist, may I ask?"

"By no means," replied Vance, now realizing he had his companion at least guessing, if not in a corner. "I am a firm believer in a Supreme Power. A first cause beyond all human comprehension. But many things which you, as a clergyman, believe in and preach, are, to my mind, so many illusions, akin to the Turk's Garden of Allah, or the Indian's Happy Hunting Grounds. These illusions, I believe, however, are needful to human happiness."

And then Vance's seat-mate turned squarely to him. "How do you know I am a clergyman?" he almost demanded.

"Why," returned Vance, "your garb, your face, your reasoning, all bespeak that. And your reasoning is keen also, from your viewpoint. In fact, you couldn't take any other, being a preacher. If you did, you would lose your position in short order. Most church attendants want, need, in fact, to have the assurance of a literal heaven given them. Once, in your boyhood, they were assured of a literal hell with all its terrors, which was not so consoling. But not even the most orthodox parson preaches that horrible illusion to-

day. If cornered, he will either duck, or insist that hell is merely a state of mind. A future outcome of conscience. I like the clergy very much and believe they are doing good work," continued Vance, resolving to retaliate a little for the use of the defiant "sir" so often. "I am also sorry for many of them whose convictions are more liberal than their congregation's. For this reason they dare not utter their honest opinions for fear of splitting these congregations and losing their per-annum. I know several clergymen, splendid men, too, who have admitted as much to me. That they would far rather preach on the moral and spiritual needs of to-day, our daily relations with one another, how we can aid suffering humanity; rather than upon creeds of any name or discussion of God's plan of salvation."

"I agree with you, sir, in a degree only," came the less austere rejoinder. "We of the cloth often find ourselves in a dilemma. To know which line of thought will be acceptable to the solid men of our congregation. To adapt ourselves to the evolution of spiritual truth, added perhaps to scientific developments."

And then the engine whistled, the train halted and Vance's seat-mate got off at a sizable village with one white spire midway of its main street.

"Case of exchange with my clerical friend," Vance thought, "and I wonder who had the worse of it. But I respect him for his last admissions."

When Vance reached Fort Kent with its pulp and saw mills grinding six days a week, its electric-lighted streets, its modern hotel, he made haste to do his sleuthing in order to leave the next morning.

"Do you happen to know of a trapper or hunter called Peg-leg?" he queried of the landlord after supper and while buying and lighting a cigar.

"Oh, yes, he's a character here, a sneak-thief and trapper combined. There was a warrant out for his arrest about two years ago, but guess the sheriff forgot to serve it. Just now Peg is in the cooler at Houlton, doing ninety-days' time for assault. He blew in here 'bout a week ago, told a marvelous tale of finding a mine of tourmalines, showed a handful of them as proof, and also sold a dozen to our jeweler for a dollar each. With that money he got roaring drunk with an old female associate by the name of Holland and gave her a black eye. She made a complaint, with the result that Peg won't drink split for three months." And then Vance, much relieved, made a plausible excuse for asking, and strolled out.

The local jeweler repeated the story to him, and showed him eight of his stolen gems. Vance would have bought them back at cost price if he had dared to disclose his identity, and finally, by adroit and cautious questions, learned the history of this Holland woman.

"She's been a sort of pal of Peg's," the jeweler asserted. "When he comes back a few drinks and a dollar or two will make her forgive the black eye, and maybe he will forgive her for complaining of him and causing his term in jail. What I want to find out is where these tourmalines came from. This woman claims she knows, but won't tell till she sees Peg. Maybe she's holding it as a shield from his wrath later on. She also has a few tourmalines he gave her. I've sent four away to be cut, so that I can get a line on their value."

"Peg's in jail," Vance said to himself on the way back to the hotel, "and I would better keep still and not excite this town by giving my errand away. It will be time enough two months from now." Then recalling his promise to Editor Sherman, he sent him a night-message to have his photographer meet him at Milton Mills the Monday night following.

CHAPTER X

MILTON MILLS, or the "Mills," as it was called, was an example of settlement evolution. First, Sam Milton built a log dam across the Cant-hook stream and next a log cabin. Soon a higher dam arose on the Moosehorn, and a framed sawmill near the point where it absorbed the Cant-hook, a pulp-mill came next, after which arose more and larger dwellings, stores, schoolhouse, church, and a big boarding-house, called a hotel. A telegraph-line and next a telephone followed the stage-road, so that when Vance came here after his mine discovery, the Mills had grown to a sizable village.

And now, arriving here late Monday evening from Fort Kent, his first step was to the post-office for letters. There was the faint hope of one from Ollie. None greeted him, only a telegram from Sherman that his photographer, Nelson, would probably reach there Tuesday night. And then Vance began calculating and planning. Evidently he must await this Nelson, next take him by canoe to Uncle Terry's cabin, and as it seemed

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advisable to hire a bateau with two men, he decided to take a load of non-perishable provisions up to that cabin. And then another thought came, to add a can of powder and fuse with drills and hammer to obtain access to the lower part of the crevasses where more tourmalines might be found. He, therefore, set about it early the next morning. Later he thought of Sherman and his offer of twenty dollars a column for "stuff." "And why not one now?" Vance said to himself, then hastened to the store, learned that a typist, the wife of a doctor who owned a small drug-store, could be hired. To her he applied and obtaining her promise to do his work, returned to his room and began, "Wilderness Life, Part One."

He opened it with his own start for the woods, the ending of all roadways, how river or stream came next, to ascend by canoe or bateau, followed by a weird description of setting up tents in semi-darkness, while it rained in torrents. Also described cooking a meal and eating it as they had done, and finally the deluge of rain and tornado of wind that almost swept away their canvas shelter. He added many touches of lesser interest, how they had feared this outcome and had groped around in total darkness to find stones to

hold tent-pegs in place, how the trees creaked and moaned, how the tempest bellowed and screamed, and then what a blessing the arrival of daylight was to them. He wrote as it had all felt and seemed to him, with its comic side and touch of romance added. When he had covered twenty pages of copy, he took it to the typist, then wrote more, so that by mid-afternoon his article was finished. He also wrote to Sherman to edit all copy carefully, and also put "Miss Ollie Oaks, the Cape, Southport Island," on his list as a subscriber and charge to Vance Harper. And then came four more hours of waiting until the stage arrived with a single passenger, a slim young man carrying a suit-case and photo-outfit.

"Mr. Nelson, I suppose," was Vance's greeting, and soon they were in conversation about the forthcoming trip.

"We are to paddle up-stream and carry around three rapids, one almost a mile long," Vance assured him, after supper and while they smoked. "Are you familiar with a canoe?"

"Oh, yes, I owned one when I was a boy and used to paddle around in a small pond," came the confident answer, and then Vance stared at his light fall suit, white shirt, and tan shoes, and smiled.

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"Ever been in the woods before?" he next queried.

"No, I know nothing of camp life, except what I have read."

"Then paddling a canoe until your back and arms collapse, helping carry one through a mile of tangled undergrowth, eating 'ham and' or fried trout from a tin plate, and sleeping under a canoe will all be new experiences to you, Mr. Nelson?"

"They will, and I anticipate them all very much, except carrying the canoe."

Vance found he had good grit the next day, however, and although he often halted his paddle-strokes to wipe perspiration from his face, until they became mere dabs by noon, he still kept them up. A stop was made then for a hastily-cooked dinner, the camp was reached at night-fall, and now Mr. Nelson was scarcely able to crawl out of the canoe.

"O gee!" he exclaimed, after helping draw it out on the bank, "but I am all in, and then some! And," looking at his hands, "I've got blisters on every finger and both thumbs. But I am enjoying the trip all right."

"Well, cheer up," said Vance, encouragingly, "the worst is yet to come," then hastened up to camp to learn how work had progressed, while

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Nelson, a born artist, adjusted his camera to take a view of the white-crested, down-leaping rapids.

To his surprise, Vance found his four men had almost finished the first short stretch of road, cutting perhaps five hundred rods, and in two days more they could move onward.

"How be we goin' to do it with only one canoe?" queried Levi, anxiously, "and six miles up to the next rapids. O' course, we kin pack the tents 'n' blankets on the hosses, two men can lead 'em, 'n' arter that begin work, but it'll take me 'n' Jean two days to carry all the rest o' the stuff up in one canoe. I rather callated you'd think 'n' send up a bateau. Thar war one carried by here late yesterday arternoon, made camp above the rapids. Said they war goin' to the lake fer you." And then Vance realized that new complications would keep arising and he had best make a confidant of Levi. He did so at once, after pledging him to absolute secrecy, in fact told him the entire story from the beginning.

"My reason for keeping silent so long," he said, "was not from lack of confidence in you, Levi, but because we did not know who owned the mountain. Even to hint to any one what we found there would have been dangerous until we had bought or obtained a lease of so valuable a find. Now we

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have leased all we want for twenty years and are secure. But we don't want notoriety any sooner than we can help, so you must keep mum. You would better do as you suggested in regard to moving : you and Jean can then canoe up enough stores to last till I get back. I shall then buy the bateau owned by one of the men I sent in and that will solve the problem."

But the slim young man with blistered hands soon found, as Vance had assured him, that "the worst was yet to come" in reality. Their canoe and small outfit was carried around this first rapid by Levi and John, but by the time the next one was carried by, Vance shouldering the forward end, Nelson's shoes were black with mud, his trousers torn, collar a limp rag, and he a physical wreck. But the next carry, a mile long, with a bit of swamp midway—well, he never forgot it, for his trousers were now in shreds and mud-coated, shoes full of holes, and white shirt in rags. Furthermore, he was so weary and lame that he lay down and groaned.

"You called the turn, all right, Mr. Harper," he said, sitting up and smiling after a moment's rest, and looking at his shredded pants. "My coat and vest are all right in the canoe, but what am I to do for pants when I get out of this scrape?"

It's buy a whole suit or go home in a barrel, I guess. And we have to go back the same way. O Lord!" he added lugubriously, "when I reach Milton Mills again, all the pants I'll have will be the waistband." This brought a hearty laugh from both.

It was now five o'clock, with Vance surprised because he had not overtaken the bateau. But no time could be wasted waiting for it, so after a brief rest the two tired ones paddled on. And never were two canoeists more glad to reach a sheltering log cabin than they were.

The bateau had not arrived, it was almost pitch dark, except for starlight, and, carrying their small camp outfit, both hastened to the empty cabin.

The next morning was a bright September one, and young Nelson almost went into raptures over their surroundings. And well he might, for the placid lake, reflecting a carpet of scarlet, yellow and green foliage, was one picture; the mountain glowing with the same mingled tints was another, while, to add romance, just across the lake stood two deer watching the arrivals. Nelson soon adjusted his camera and supports, took a picture of the gully looking up, another of the crevasse above, one from the mountain-top, including cabin

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and lake, and later added a view of the mountain from below the cabin, and a vista of the lake itself. Vance watched him in the meantime.

"They will fill a full page of our next Sunday issue," Nelson said, exultingly, "and that's when your write-up appears. We shall also advertise it Saturday as our banner issue, and containing a full account of the greatest mine discovery ever made in New England with pictures of its location. Guess it will sell all right!"

And then Vance smiled at the ways of modern journalism. "We'll go fishing, now," he said, leading the way to their canoe, "that is, if you can cast a fly." As Nelson had never attained that art, he let them trail behind the canoe, which answered, and before noon a goodly string was caught. It was late that afternoon when the bateau arrived, for they, knowing the river bank better than Levi, even, had taken the opposite shore for the long carry and so Vance had missed them. He explained to them the next morning that he had discovered a peculiar kind of colored rock-crystals of some value in a crevasse, and that they were to help him a few hours by drilling and blasting a flat boulder. And while the drilling went on, Vance sat watching with keen hopes of another valuable find of tourmalines, for just now

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it would prove a godsend. It took two hours to drill four holes of suitable depth ; then these were filled with powder, long fuses inserted, wet clay tamped in, the fuses lit by one man, and after the rest had hidden behind rocks, he then sought hurried safety. But the blast was only a partial success, merely splitting the big flat rock into three parts.

"What ye want is dynamite," one of the men explained ; "that'll blow yer rock to flinders."

"Yes," rejoined Vance, "and so it would you men on a carry if you dropped it. Besides, a license is required to transport it."

He also decided to try again, so three more holes were drilled and loaded rocks were piled above them and this time the split boulder was so rent asunder that its parts could be pried out. And then, as once before, and with chisel in hand, Vance almost dove into the lower crevasse, to dig amid the still smoking gravel while the rest watched. There was only a small pocket laid bare, and within an hour Vance had dug it twice over and found about fifty average-sized tourmalines. He looked them over later with Nelson, decided they would be worth about five hundred dollars, and as it was only midday now, concluded to start down-stream at once. The party did so,

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after Vance had locked the cabin with hasp and padlock, and by nightfall had made the long carry on the eastern side of the stream and camped below it. And that night the tenderfoot, Nelson, had his first experience of sleeping under a canoe. He did not sleep much, however, in spite of being tired and having the music of the rapids to lull him. When daylight came he crawled out with all clothing on except his collar, and began rubbing his back, shoulders, and hips.

"What's troubling you?" asked Vance, also awake.

"Oh, nothing much; only I am feeling of myself to find which spot is the sorest. It seems as if I'd lain on a pile of stones all night."

By the middle of the forenoon, the next carry was passed and tents reached on the opposite shore. And so ended Nelson's first and probably last experience with real canoe life.

Vance directed Pip to convey him down-stream immediately after dinner. "And mind you don't forget to go to the post-office and ask for letters for me," he added. "If you bring me one, I will give you half a pound of tobacco."

And Pip, departing, wondered how any man could be fool enough to pay that for the bringing of a letter.

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It was late when the lad returned, but Vance was still up and waiting. He was rewarded by a large square letter in a lady's hand. How eagerly he opened and read it by the light of one tallow candle can easily be guessed. It was unique in its diction, with dashes freely used, and many exclamation points.

"DEAR MR. HARPER," it began.

"Your delightful letter has been received and enjoyed. I could just see you setting tents up in the dark, cooking with tornadoes roaring, rain pattering on stove and in the 'ham and'—sputtering—wonder you didn't get your eyes put out! And that supper!—feast rather—I can just see how it looked spread on boxes, you holding a trout by its head and eating backwards! My! I can taste it now! Do you know, I never ate fried brook trout but once and the taste lingers still. And then, sleeping upon wet boughs with rain playing a tattoo on the tent! What splendid health you men must have! I should not speak aloud for a week after! And that tempest moaning and screaming through the great tall trees. What gnomes and hobgoblins you could conjure there!

"And morning with the storm of brown and yellow leaves sweeping through the forest—that solid procession of them leaping over the rapids and ever onward down the river!

"Your letter was just full of poetic fancies. Didn't imagine you had so many—you who

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wanted to argue about illusions ! Your descriptions were so graphic too—made me see and feel everything, even hear that tornado. Have nothing to write about here, or of self. Just the same daily round, the simple life. Hoping to hear from you again, I remain,

“Sincerely yours,
“OLLIE OAKS.”

Vance, after reading it twice, felt a bit disappointed, first at its brevity, and next because there was not even a hint of interest in him, or that she ever cared to see him again.

CHAPTER XI

WITH the photographer disposed of (he was commissioned to deliver to Professor Moss the small package of tourmalines and a letter), with camp stores all planned, Vance was in position to join his men, and did so with grim determination. And how the ax chorus now rang from dawn to dark! How the trees crashed in the mellow autumn air! How the "All together, now!" of the men lifting a log into place echoed through the forest! And how good each simple meal tasted, especially the evening one, with its pipes afterward, while all lounged around the cheery camp-fire! Before daylight Pip was up, starting a fire with the ever-faithful Levi soon following when both took a wash beside the leaping rapids. Soon the rest were up and doing the same, and before sun-up all were gathered around the low camp table, three short boards resting upon logs. And the meals? A succession of fried ham, potatoes, hot biscuit and coffee, varied by grilled venison, hash, and pork and beans twice a week. With Sunday came a later

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breakfast, after which the men either hunted for deer or fished in the stream. That first Sunday after Nelson's departure, Vance wrote his partner :

"I have now settled down to steady work, wear khaki jumpers and deerskin shoes. My hands are getting calloused, have just shaved, first time in a week, and feel civilized once more. The 'Argus' photo man came in looking like a tailor's model ; after he had made three carries twice over he much resembled a scarecrow. To-day, so he informed me, his paper would publish my write-up, fully illustrated. Send me a copy. I hope the fifty odd tourmalines I sent you will return a few hundred dollars. We shall need it. Up to date as nearly as I can figure, we have expended nearly a thousand dollars. Of course, we are stocked ahead with supplies for three months. The men shoot one or two deer a week which saves us some on ham and pork. You would be surprised how much meat we all eat here. To-night we shall feast on fried trout."

After writing this report, Vance wavered between a letter to Ollie or going fishing, then realizing that no letters could leave camp for six days, decided to fish. "I can write her a short one later, which may pique her to return a longer letter next time," which proves not only the almost childishness of masculine love, but that its course never runs smooth.

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But the main thought of Vance just now was their need of money. "Twenty dollars a column will help some," he thought after casting an hour under the bright sun and securing only six small trout. "They will rise better late in the afternoon," he decided, then betook himself to camp and a pad of copy-paper. He covered twenty sheets of this before dinner, added as many more after that, all devoted to "carries" and the savage life of sleeping under canoes. He also wrote Sherman to have his article typed, and edit it, for obvious reasons.

That evening he had a long talk with Levi alone, about Peg-leg, and if there were the slightest chance of recovering the pouch of stolen gems.

"Where do you imagine he hid them?" Vance questioned. Then, after a moment's thought, Levi answered, "Most likely som'ers clus by his shack on Squash Lake. That's his only home winters, 'n' he probably went thar to hide 'em the first thing. The next, as ye found out, war to paddle to Fort Kent, sell a few, 'n' hev a drunk. I callate when he gits out o' jail he may, when spring comes, foller the St. Francis over into Canada whar he come from 'n' stay thar, onless that Holland woman holds him back. He will, sartin, if he callates he'll git 'rested agin. Three

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months o' jail'll make him wary. Mebbe, also, he'll take his loot 'n' the Holland hag both over to Canada. Ye can't figger how sich cattle'll act."

"How far is it to Squash Lake by canoe?" Vance next asked, with a faint idea of going there to search for his tourmalines.

"Oh, 'bout three days. Ye go down to the Mills, up the Moosehorn to Bog Stream, up that to Loon Pond, carry two miles to Squash Brook, 'n' down that to the lake."

"And is there a possible chance of finding our gems?"

"Wal, it's a needle 'n' haymow one, if any. I should callate it war time wasted." And then Vance sighed, for he could not give up the hope of securing their forty-thousand-dollar find, so sorely needed now.

Monday began a week of steady work, ending with half the second piece of road cut through. On Friday evening, also, Vance wrote a short letter to the Professor and a longer one to Ollie.

"We are making good progress in our work," he assured her, "and are half-way through the second stretch of road-cutting. I am getting to look like a savage, face brown, hands calloused, and hair uncut. I wear jumpers and flannel shirt like a lumberjack, look like one, in fact, and sleep

on fir twigs, unconscious of their half-inch butts. Our cook, Pip—Friday I called him a few times—is kept busy and the pans filled with ‘ham and,’ with another of grilled venison, which we devour would astonish you! And that reminds me of Pip’s illusion. ‘Why yer call me Friday?’ he said one day. ‘Friday be ver onlucky day. I stop ‘n’ cross myself every time you do.’ How is that for an illusion? He is a good French-Canadian Catholic; counts his beads every night, and is a faithful lad, whom I like.

“I received and enjoyed your brief, breezy letter, but as you will probably receive and maybe read my press accounts of wood life, I omit further description. As I can only obtain letters each Saturday, a longer one will be more enjoyable.”

When Ollie read his brief, friendly missive, she smiled. “Tit for tat,” she said to herself, “and I guess wild-wood life and hard work will soon kill his budding illusion about me.”

With Saturday night and Vance sitting up until Pip returned from the Mills came two letters, one from the Professor with enclosure of two pages from the “Morning Argus’s” Sunday issue, one of which Vance read first, and was astounded to see that Sherman had eliminated all mention of the theft of the tourmalines. The big letter caption, “Great Discovery of Tourmalines! A Fortune Found by Vance Harper and Professor Moss

of H—— College,” also made Vance gasp. “Why, we shall both be notorious now and have promoters and mine-stock sharps after us like a swarm of hornets!” he muttered, then added with a loud laugh, “But poor Pro will hear from them first! Fancy that mild little man choking off a bold, almost insolent promoter! I can see him now, wiping his eye-glasses, staring at some persistent schemer for fifteen minutes, fidgeting meantime, then finally assuring him in mild voice that he can’t possibly listen any longer!”

His letter, next read, fully corroborated Vance’s guess; for it assured him that the Professor was getting exasperated at being followed and bored by so many questioning friends, and likewise getting angry at the persecution of promoters.

“Why, one or more of them has called every evening since Sunday,” he wrote, “proposing all sorts of schemes to make a stock company for us. To set a price on our mine, or capitalize it for a million dollars. I realize that you had to raise money on your boat, but I am sorry you yielded to Sherman and gave him the write-up, even if it meant so much money.”

When Vance opened the second missive, a check for five hundred dollars was pinned to the single sheet of typed letter which read:

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"MY DEAR BOY:

"Your write-up was splendid and made a hit. Am receiving letters from capitalists asking for more information with a view to investing. One man wrote asking if it was all a hoax to sell papers. Another that he had hunted around your mountain, recognized the lake and cabin, and wanted to know where a letter would reach you. Said he had called on Professor Moss, but couldn't get a word out of him. I think I have given you a boost that will lead to a fortune. I hope so, for your father's sake. Your second article received; it is fine, shall run it next Sunday. Keep them coming.

"Yours truly,

"SHERMAN."

Vance, smiling and feeling a new exhilaration from the editor's letter, lit his pipe and began to ponder on the developing situation. "Here we are widely advertised with our mine and forty-thousand find," he thought. "Men with money are anxious to invest it with us, to make a million-dollar stock company. We can set a valuation of more than half that upon our leased property and so control the company. Probably Uncle Terry would sell us the leased land for five thousand, and be glad to. Then I could manage matters as I saw fit on a good salary, instead of sleeping on fir twigs and knock-

ing skin off my hands handling logs. It would be a case of letting anxious investors furnish capital and do the worrying," and then Vance lay awake an hour considering this new outlook and its possibilities, also recalling how Uncle Terry had advised the same capitalization plan. One vital argument in favor of this scheme was that the Professor and himself would be practically out of funds by the time drilling could be started, and then what, if no more tourmalines were found? To obviate that risk, here was ample capital with an almost equal division of profits with stockholders, if he was honest (as he always determined to be), with all risk to Moss & Harper eliminated. All in all, a Spanish chateau of enthralling attraction.

With morning came sober second-thought, more optimistic courage to Vance, and grim determination to fight his battle alone. One reason for this was his utter abomination of all dishonest promoters, those who, knowing their proposition to be absolutely worthless, or without one chance in ten of making good, would yet inveigle easily duped men of small means, women anxious to obtain more than four per cent. on a few hundred dollars saved, even old widows, to whom the loss of several thousands in the

bank meant the poor-farm. If this capitalizing plan were carried out, some one must sell stock on commission, he well knew ; but he wouldn't do it. They might, probably would, induce such confiding investors to buy, and if the mine failed to pan out, he would be hated by them ever after. "No," he said to himself, shouldering his ax, "the Professor is confident ; I am going to play a lone hand with no after sneers or curses from anybody."

On Saturday came seven letters and a marked copy of the "Argus" containing his second article. Naturally he read Ollie's letter first and that coy maid had written him an eight-page one, complimenting him upon his write-up, telling how surprised she was on receiving it, and how interested Uncle Terry had been in the pictures. "' They kinder take me back to my one fool idea,'" Ollie wrote, quoting him, "' but I took a heap o' comfort two summers, anyway.'"

"Uncle is growing more and more interested in you," she continued, "and when spring comes and you reach camp, I am sure he will go up to visit you for a few days. I enjoyed your first letter much the best, it was so poetic, so vivid. Shall hope for another like it some day. The one thing I am most grateful for, however, is that no

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one at the Cape has remembered your name or connected you with the press story. It has saved us many embarrassing questions."

Vance felt equally gratified.

The next letter Vance opened was from the "Argus," containing a check for seventy-six dollars and saying :—

"Part two of your series received and O. K. Shall want one for each Sunday issue.

"SHERMAN."

"What a busy place a newspaper office is," commented Vance as he read the above, scrawled in that editor's handwriting. "They don't even find time to address a letter inside." Of the other five, three were from the much-despised promoting fraternity, and two from firms manufacturing machinery. The first three he tossed into the fire ; the other two he saved. All were directed to "22 Orchard Street," and forwarded by the Professor.

By the last of the following week the second section of road was opened, the stream crossed by advice of Levi after looking both sides over, and a new camp established. Had Vance guessed what this change of plan would cost him, it would probably have never been made.

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Now came the long fight of a mile cut through solid timber with a swamp ravine midway. As it was now well into October, the hardwood leaves had ceased their down-stream procession, ice formed nightly in shallow pools, and the "Honk, honk" of wild geese, south-bound, was no longer heard.

The work also became more strenuous, winter was not far off, snow usually fell here in November, and a heavy fall of two or three feet would cripple them seriously. All the others seemed to realize it fully as much as Vance, and worked with more vim. He had also prepared for it, in a way. Had had enough stores sent in to last a month. A small tent-stove, with asbestos ring to protect the canvas, had arrived, and the cook-stove had been surrounded on three sides by a pen of driven saplings, thatched with hemlock bark and roof of same. To protect that from the heat, Levi had surrounded the pipe with flat stones and mud. Vance now sent John to the Mills each Saturday morning, starting earlier, for two carries must now be made, and Vance felt that he must keep in touch with the outside world. Each Sunday he wrote a short letter to Ollie, just friendly in tone, as she had seemed to wish, then about a three-column write-up of the "Wilderness Life" series,

with usually a short letter to his partner. And so week by week the time passed, rod after rod of road was cut, the swamp ravine reached and its gullies bridged with logs, and the forest beyond next entered. Meantime, the short stretches of rapids close by kept leaping and laughing, the sun rose into a smoky sky each morning, an Indian-summer mildness pervaded the air, and it seemed to Vance, now dreading the first snowfall, that for once in life good luck came to him.

"Snow he come soon," croaked John one noon, glancing up at a broad stretch of mackerel sky.

"Well, we are ready for it," responded Vance cheerfully, "and a week more will bring us to the stream above the rapids. After that, snow can go hang."

It was now past the middle of November. Thicker ice skimmed the pools each night, in fact remained there, and a certain rawness in the air was keenly felt. But only about twenty rods, or four days' work, was left of their long, hard task. It was now mid-week and Vance thought of a certain contingency. If snow came two or three feet deep, or the stream froze over, that would end all communication with the Mills except on foot, and an almost sixty-mile tramp, going and returning, was a serious matter. Not even Long

John, a hardy woodsman, would care to try it, except to save life.

"I think you would better go to the Mills day after to-morrow," he said to him, "and bring us five pairs of snow-shoes. I must also send out mail."

"We shall need 'em ver soon," John responded, "mebbe in day or two. I smell snow in ze air. I best go in morning." And Vance, believing in the wisdom of this old woodsman, assented, and at once set about getting his mail ready. He wrote steadily for four hours, squatting on a box, until supper was ready, then after that three hours more by the dim light of tallow candles. By that time he had finished two more "Wilderness Life" sketches. He then rubbed his back, took a walk out and a look at the starlit sky, then returned to his rude desk and two more letters. To Ollie he wrote :

"We are within four days of the end of our task. Our wood-wise John and Levi agree that snow is soon to fall. When it does or the river freezes slightly, that will end all communication with the world for several weeks. I shall leave here as soon as the river is frozen enough to bear me. Shall probably remain in the city until after Christmas. I may run down to call on you on my way back. I must also look up and buy ma-

chinery now. When I go out, of course I shall pick up mail at the Mills."

"There," he said folding and directing his letter, "if she has the faintest wish to see me, she must say so."

To the Professor he also wrote the same information as to his plans.

When morning dawned Vance found John had cooked and eaten his own breakfast, likewise had two slices of ham and two of venison with a half-dozen cold biscuit and some hardtack wrapped in a towel. "I may git caught on ze way back," he explained. "Ze snow he come soon." Then wrapping in his blanket the mail Vance gave him, adding the package of meat and a box of matches, he picked up a camp hatchet and strode away to his canoe on the bank below the rapids. Vance followed him for a parting "Good luck to you, John," then watched him paddle away with rapid strokes. And then Vance glanced anxiously around the sky. The only ominous sign, however, was an unusually red tinge along the border of the eastern horizon.

Soon the four left for the three-quarter mile walk to their work, also carrying the necessaries for dinner to save the time of returning to camp. The others, noticing as Vance had done, the red

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rising sun and scenting snow, began work with a vim as never before. And how the axes rang with a "chit-chat, chit-chat," in steady unison! How the chips flew, the trees crashed, while the axe chorus continued, and not a man halted for one moment! By noon, when dinner was ready, five of the twenty rods had been opened, logs cut off and rolled aside from the trees, always felled from right or left. And while they were enjoying their much needed dinner, Levi paused, cocked his head one side and said, "Hear that? Woodpecker," he added as all listened to the faint or near-by "rat-tat" of those birds. Then glancing up to the now dim sun, he continued, "Snow by night, boys, sure's a gun! Never heard them 'peckers all join at once 'thout it did."

But six hours now of daylight were theirs and all used, until twilight ended that hard day's work with fine snow sifting down through the spruce trees.

The long-dreaded snowfall had arrived.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Peg-leg, a human fox, inborn thief, and sensual brute combined, saw Vance holding up his gems to flash in the light of the setting sun, he knew they must be of value. He had been trailing Vance and companions for two days, waiting for a chance to steal. Now he guessed that something better than camp-stores might be filched, so sneaked away through undergrowth to his canoe, well hidden up a small stream, entering the lake near its outlet, ate a supper of mouldy jerked venison, with hardtack and a can of cherries some one else had paid for. By early dawn he was back at his vantage-point, where he watched Vance and the Professor go up the gully to dig, heard all they said about their marvelous discovery, saw them ascend the narrow, rock-filled gorge, and following as nimbly as one leg would permit, ever-watchful lest one turn around, he hid between two rocks near the mountain-top and heard their plans to hide the gems. After they had gone down the gully, passing within a few rods of him, he followed the tracks

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of Vance even on moss-coated stones, and soon found the pouch of tourmalines. He next sneaked around the southern slope of the mountain, ever watching and listening until safely back in his canoe. Then he seized his paddle and pushed out and down lake and stream and by sunset was twenty miles away and munching mouldy venison once more.

So vanished a bag of tourmalines worth a small fortune !

Two days later, with his last hardtack long since eaten, this semi-savage at nightfall reached his slate cabin on Squash Lake. The next thing was to gorge himself with canned beans, chicken, and fruit, all stolen, then he examined his loot by firelight. When morning came he decided to hide most of them near by, then carrying a few to paddle to Fort Kent, and sell them if possible.

Now came the selection of a hiding-place, and, strange to say, a crow that cawed dismally from the top of a tall stump midway of a neck of swamp just across the lake decided it. Peg-leg knew the landmark, a half-open, hollow spruce trunk, minus all dead branches and just above the swamp's water level on a bit of hard ground. He was not long in paddling across the lake, crawled up through the bush-tangled morass, and digging

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a deep hole within the open stump, covered the leather pouch with moss and decaying wood, and departed. He failed to notice in his haste, however, that the inside of this big hollow stump showed many deep claw-marks, or that a few feet above its opening the vital growth of a big limb had left a large inside shelf of dead wood. Nor did he notice that an old lucivee had discovered this shelf long before.

With so much of Peg's cunning scheme thus executed, his next and most unwise act was to paddle to Fort Kent and accept the local jeweler's offer of a dollar each for a dozen of the best gems. And no man, or rather brute, was more astonished than Peg at the offer. He would have taken a quarter each without question. And now with so much money came a long-desired debauch with the only female who would even look at him, followed by a cooling and hard-working outcome that made this human fox hate all mankind more than ever.

CHAPTER XIII

“WHY couldn't this snow have held off two days longer?” demanded Vance of nobody in particular as the four weary men reached camp once more, scarcely able to see the white tents for the darkness.

“Wal, it's the luck o' things,” rejoined Levi, consolingly, “but it might 'a' ben wuss. The snow might 'a' ketched us in that swamp, 'n' then 'twould 'a' ben pizen.”

It was now pitch-dark, and the snow was falling fast. Soon, however, a cheery fire blazed between two logs in front of the big tent facing southwards. Another glow came from the cook-stove, and the little one in the rear of the big tent with flaps turned back added more cheer. Next Pip returned from the river with water and had his pail of potatoes and pot of coffee on the cook-stove, Levi cut ham and pork in thick slices, while Jean swept the snow from the table-boards, carried them inside the tent to rest upon boxes, and then spread the tinware upon the crude table.

“I am worried about John,” Vance announced

after opening a can of cherries and placing a pan of cold biscuit on the table. "He started at five o'clock this morning; it's now seven—fourteen hours, and something must have happened."

"Oh, he'll fetch in all right," answered Levi, turning slices of venison in the frying-pans. "I callate he got hindered somehow. Mebbe 'twas dark by the time he got to the second carry, so o' course he'd leave his canoe 'n' foot it up. 'N' follerin' a stream whar it's pitch-dark is slow work."

Levi was right, for just as supper was ready Long John, with blanket-bundle strapped to his back, paddle in hand, and white with snow, entered the zone of light.

"Got hindered to git snow-shoes," he announced, unstrapping his pack and shaking himself. "Only two at store. I go to squaw for rest. She live mile away. Got 'em, though, but left canoe below rapid." And then it dawned upon Vance why John had brought the paddle along.

When daylight came, a foot of snow covered the ground and it was still falling. It was possible to work, however, and the hardy little gang set about it. All that forenoon the axes rang and the trees fell. At noon a cold bite was eaten while the men sat on fallen logs, and then were up and

at it again. By night the snowfall ceased, for which all felt grateful. By morning the temperature had drooped decidedly, with an overcast sky. Conditions held so for two days, except that it became slightly warmer, and then late that Saturday afternoon the last tree had fallen and the undergrowth had been cut away from the stream's bank. And then Vance and his faithful men gave one prolonged hurrah.

The road into the wilderness was open !

"I guess we're boxed up," Levi announced, on their way back to camp. "The ice won't bear on the lake yet. We might cut a channel 'crost the stream, bring up the bateau, let the horses swim, 'n' so cross it. But then it's four miles o' thick swamp 'n' scrub to the cabin."

"I guess we have got to stay here until it freezes more," responded Vance, realizing the situation, and wishing it would freeze soon. That night snow fell again, kept on the next day, while those snow-bound men sat around the camp-stove, or watched the ever falling flakes. Vance, to relieve his mind, wrote Part Six of his articles and devoted it to snow in the woods, with all it meant. He knew well that he might not be able to send it out for weeks. Neither was he.

For another long week those men, to kill time,

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cleared the snow away from around the camp with crudely made shovels, brought both canoes up to it, then dug a mile-long path through the roadway to the stream. It was now well into December, and Vance was fretting over the irksome delay. He felt that he must leave there as soon as his men and outfit were safe at the log cabin, but not before. And then on the tenth came the long-awaited freezing, and so sharp was the night that Levi started a fire in the camp-stove while all, fully dressed, sat around it until dawn.

"We've got to get away from here, now," he announced when morning came. "It's liable to drop to twenty or thirty below, and we jest couldn't stand it in a tent." He tested the ice on the stream while breakfast was being cooked, and then the breaking-up of camp began. Both tents were struck, and one spread over their bob-sled. Boxes of stores and cooking utensils were packed upon this, together with the two trunks, rifles, and guns Vance had brought; and then three of the men with their rude shovels started ahead to dig and trample a narrow path up stream and lake.

"We've got to make two trips," Levi asserted, while he and Vance roped on the sled's big load and after a glance around at both stoves and the unbroken boxes still left. "Then thar's the canoes.

We can't leave 'em here." And now with both horses hitched in single file to the sled, the start for Uncle Terry's cabin was made. A bitterly cold and tiresome task they had. Four men kept ahead of the horses led by Levi, and shoveled and tramped a narrow path up the lake through almost three feet of snow, while the sun shone faintly. When a halt was made for a cold snack of fried ham and biscuit, Levi glanced up at the dim sun. "More snow up thar," he asserted ominously, "'n' it'll be down soon ez it moderates." And Vance felt that he was likely to be held prisoner here all winter. It was nightfall once more when the string of five men and two horses finally reached the cabin. And what a blessing its shelter then seemed! Each man's trousers were frozen stiff, his beard or moustache was an ice-clad one, and all were dead tired. The sled was speedily unpacked, Pip started a roaring fire in the cabin, the rest, by feeling, strung one tent across the cabin's side to shelter the horses, and within an hour that weary band, wearing dry socks and drawers in place of frozen trousers and camp shoes, now drying above the open fire, once more gathered around the plank table with almost hilarious joy.

A space south of the cabin was cleared from

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snow the next morning. The big tent, with the little one under it, was set up for the horses and then Levi and John with both horses and sled started back to their old camp to fetch canoes, stores, etc., while the rest cut a thick bough bed for the horses and shoveled snow away in front of the cabin. As a precaution, they lashed the tent to the cabin with two long ropes. "That'll hold it, I callate," Jean announced, looking at the double lashings four feet apart.

That night, true to Levi's prediction, the cold moderated, snow began falling, and when dawn came, six inches were added to the earth's coat, and the air was so full of big flakes that no one could see two rods away. It kept on thus until late in the afternoon when the wind woke up and soon a tornado was raging and roaring around the cabin.

What a merry, elfin dance was now on! How that gale whistled, moaned, shouted, screamed, and bellowed like a fog siren all night! How the thick falling flakes whirled, swirled, and swept around cabin and tent in an almost solid blast! How they curled in fantastic drifts until both cabin and tent were almost hidden, and one long drift lay level with the top of the tent! By midnight the screaming tornado so shook that solid log cabin that Vance woke up, started a fire, and

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found a shallow drift from beneath the cabin door lay across its floor. A deeper one showed under the south and only window left open. The rest also arose and all worried about tent and horses for two hours, but nothing more could be done. Then they rested.

All the next day it snowed fitfully, and when the sun shone over the tree-tops the following morn it was fully six feet deep, with a drift that reached the tent-pole, half enclosing the cabin and tent.

They were snow-bound now in reality !

Vance had read of Maine wilderness snow-storms ; how men caught away from camp in one had perished, how for weeks, even, no lumbermen could leave camp, and how if any ran short of supplies their only resource was to hunt a deer on snow-shoes or kill a horse. He now felt very grateful for Levi's wise foresight that had not only stocked their cabin with supplies, but enabled them to reach it in time to meet the awful snow-fall. Had they delayed even one day, they would now be buried in one thin tent, surrounded by six feet of snow, with a temperature thirty or forty degrees below zero to combat !

Something else also vexed Vance just now. He had planned to spend the holiday in the city, possibly to call on Uncle Terry (which meant

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Ollie) on the way, but here he was locked in a cabin by six feet of snow and the Mills thirty miles away, and only ten days before Christmas.

"I guess I ought to be thankful I am living and in so warm a cabin," he said to himself, with resignation. "The city will still be there later on, and most likely Ollie isn't a bit anxious to see me; she has never even hinted that she was." Then he donned his fur coat and went out to see Levi and Jean shovel a path to the lake through snow reaching above their heads.

It took till noon to reach it and cut a hole through the foot of ice. The horses were next led to it for a much-needed drink, the snow again shoveled from the piazza, and just then Vance recalled his first visit here over three months before, for in spite of snow or tornado, the dead vines still clung to its lattice-work of inch-thick saplings.

But how to get out of the woods was now the absorbing question. He had planned to leave two or three men here to build a larger log cabin alongside Uncle Terry's; later, if necessary to dig out the section of roadway around the rapids, and when spring and many freezings and thawings had settled the snow to a lower level, to have them meet him at the Mills and with four horses

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convoy his boiler and drilling-machine back to a working situation. But that was all three months away. He now decided to leave all the men at the camp after he escaped. They would be needed to build another cabin, keep the road open to the Mills, and later, to handle heavy machinery. Besides, they had worked so faithfully that he felt it would not be right to discharge one or two just now.

That evening another vexation was added to the others.

"I callate we war lucky takin' the east side 'round the long rapids," Levi said, "fer a high ridge o' rock—'bout a hundred rods on't—would 'a' had to be gone 'round. The only thing I don't like is that Job Ross owns the timber we cut through, 'n' ez he's the meanest cuss anywhere about, if he hears on't, you'll hev to settle, Mr. Harper."

"About how much?" queried Vance, anxiously.

"Oh, mebbe five hundred, mebbe a thousand dollars," rejoined Levi, nonchalantly, as if he supposed that to be a mere bagatelle to Vance. "He may not find it out; hasn't been over this way for years; no call to. But if he hears on't, he'll show up sure, 'n' ask ye all o' a thousand fer damages. He'll probably let you beat him down

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some. Allus asks double what a thing is wuth." And Vance recalled their small means with a new dread.

"But how about my getting out?" Vance next queried. "I must be in the city by Christmas."

"Ever used snow-shoes?" Levi asked.

"Only once, for fun, one winter at Montreal."

"Wal, thirty miles is quite a spell fer a bizness," rejoined Levi, dubiously, "'n' ten miles a day 'ud 'bout tucker ye out. That 'ud mean two nights on the way with only a blanket fer cover.

"Two on us 'ud hev to go with ye, if ye must go," he added after a pause. "Ye never could go alone 'n' live to tell on't." And then Vance began considering. He was well used to the woods in spring or fall, could paddle or pole a canoe up swift water, had slept under one many a night, and he now had experienced a taste of winter in the woods before much snow fell. But to snow-shoe thirty miles over six feet of it, to dig a hole beside a rock and add a bough shelter when night came, was quite another matter. Then he wished he had thought of a sleeping-bag instead of a portable bath-tub. He had so far not used this. It still lay folded in his trunk. And then a new thought came.

"The nights will be the worst of it, won't they,

Levi?" he queried. "Now I have a fur coat, and a portable bath-tub of rubber which with rim cut away and hoops put in will cover two of us."

"Wal, mebbe," Levi answered, still dubious, "but if more snow comes or, wuss yit, a thirty-below cold snap, all ye kin do nights is sit up 'n' tend fires. No man, 'less he's hardened to it, kin stand that n' sleep." Then Vance, extremely anxious to leave, decided to try it. "We'll wait a day or two till a spell o' warmer weather comes, ez it ginerally does arter a cold spell," Levi said, "then John 'n' I'll take ye out."

The next morning Vance began his snow-shoe practice under Levi's direction, was taught their peculiar outswing and poise of body, until after four hours of it he was able to swing away with fair speed. He also cut the rim from his bath-tub, and Levi cut some big willow stems for hoops. A list of the absolute necessities to be carried in packs was next made, so few that Vance was astonished, for they consisted of four pounds of pork for each man, one of hardtack, two pound cans of coffee, and two jars of condensed cream. For dishes, five tin plates, a two-quart pail of galvanized sheet-iron, three tin cups, and one spoon.

"Better leave your fur coat here," Levi advised. "Ye can't wear it daytimes, 'n' every pound counts.

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Take along a set o' extra underwear 'n' socks to put on nights."

When the sun rose again Levi watched it sharply, with Vance. "It's all right," the wood-wise one asserted, "not off-color, 'n' no rims 'crost it. We've got two fair days, I callate."

The start was made, courageously.

Of course Vance soon fell behind and the others were obliged to wait until, after this was repeated three times, Long John insisted on adding to his own the pack Vance carried. "We gotta go fast," he said when Vance demurred. "I no mind two packs no more as little bit." And Vance, realizing that time was more than precious, gave up his pack.

By noon they had reached their last camp at the foot of the long rapids, and before night drew near, were almost down to the head of the second one. Here Levi decided to halt and camp for the night. And right glad was Vance to do it, for with his determined efforts to keep up, the steady strain on back and legs, lifting the snow-shoes had exhausted him.

"By Jove, Levi," he exclaimed, climbing on a bare rock, "but I am all in and busted. These snow-shoes weigh all of forty pounds!"

"You'll be more so by to-morrow night," Levi

answered smilingly, "but ye jest can't gin up." Then untying both snow-shoes, he began digging snow away from the south side of a big boulder. It was quite sheltered, a clump of scrub-spruce hid it from the river, and a smaller boulder lay against its eastward side. "Kin ye dig snow now?" Levi asked after a small hole had been opened in the snow. "Ye sorter better help; thar's lots to do." And Vance, half ashamed of his weakness, began. He worked with vim until he had tossed the snow away from a ten-foot-square opening, then tying his snow-shoes, limped away to a cluster of scrub cedar and began cutting for a bough bed. He heard the small camp-axes above and below him, and soon John appeared with an armful of dry wood which he kept repeating, Levi came with trimmed saplings, tops left on, which he laid across from boulder to snow, next brought big boughs of low spruce to spread over these, until, when twilight came, they had constructed a well-thatched pen with rock on two sides and banked snow on the other, with a narrow opening into it from one corner. But it was not yet done, for now Levi brought more boughs to thatch the snow walls, John kept cutting fuel which Vance piled against the rock until, on his last trip to the dry fallen tree on the river bank,

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John fetched a pail of water. Then, with darkness around them, both guides brought their packs into camp and opened them.

Now came cooking supper, which Vance watched with keen interest. First Levi hung the pail two-thirds full of water, by a cord from a sapling midway the narrow opening, poured coffee into it, and started a fire under it. This he watched constantly, feeding it with one or two sticks of dry wood at a time, while John cut slices of pork and then, half splitting a two-foot stick, pushed a tin plate into the split end and filled it with pork. Vance had expected the pork would be frizzled on the ends of sticks, but this was new to him. Soon the coffee boiled, to be set aside, the pan of pork was next sputtering over the flames, the slices turned with a forked stick, and when browned a little, Levi set the plate before Vance, filled a tin cup with coffee, and opened a can of cream. "Supper's ready," he next announced, and as Vance speared a slice of pork with his hunting-knife, he realized how simple a meal could satisfy a woodsman. He was keenly hungry and how delicious those slices of browned salt pork were! How good the coffee! Even the hardtack with pork fat, spread with the only spoon they had brought, tasted good.

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Vance had eaten many wilderness meals cooked in all ways, venison broiled on the end of a forked stick, partridges split half open, then broiled with a bit of pork inside, trout browned the same way or rolled in green leaves and baked under hot ashes. But never one like this, squatting in a snow-surrounded, bough-thatched pen. And never before had fried salt pork and hardtack tasted like this.

A smoke was next enjoyed while the low fire was kept burning, and then Vance, for the good of all, split the ends of his bath-tub and spread it over the fir bed. To conserve the heat, Levi spread one blanket over the rubber sheet, the two others came next, the snow-shoes were laid across the narrow opening, and with outer coats for pillows and feet toward the dying fire, sleep came to those leg-weary men and remained with them until daylight.

With morning came more pork and hot coffee; then packs were made up, snow-shoes tied on, and once more the slow march began. They crossed the river to follow the road they had cut, and then Levi shook his head ominously. "Don't like that sun," he muttered. "Too red fer us," and pushed forward with longer strides. Vance did his best to keep up, but every muscle in his

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back and legs was lame. He kept up until noon came, with a halt on top of a bare boulder. Here a few dry sticks served to half cook three slices of pork, and these were eaten with hardtack only, and then the march resumed.

Soon a strange blur began to dim the sight of Vance. He was just behind the two guides, but now and then failed to see them. He rubbed his eyes with handfuls of snow, but still the blur remained. The three men had entered the first stretch of roadway, a narrow white lane with two green walls bordering it. The two guides ahead were now merely black stumps to Vance, swaying from side to side as they strode on. He set his teeth, resolving not to call to them, but to catch up. And thus struggling, came a sudden dread lest this snow-blindness (for such he knew it to be) would blind him for life, always to be in darkness! He thought of Ollie's sweet face—was he never to see it again? The Professor, Myra, the mountain, his plans and hopes, all came to him in a flash of thought. He had started on this almost mad venture mainly to see Ollie, to interest her if he could, and now all hope of her, everything but life-darkness, seemed vanishing. The sun glared like a monstrous red eye through driving scud, but Vance saw it not, only the two figures ahead and

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above silhouetted on the sky. And what if his senses should fail him now and he should pitch forward and into six feet of snow? That meant suffocation and death before either of his guides would look back. At this moment, horrified by his frightful thought and growing blindness, he gave one piercing cry of, "Levi, Levi, help, help!" In an instant both guides turned and almost leaped back to him.

"I am fast growing blind," Vance almost moaned as his arms were grasped by them.

"No danger on't. We'll keer fer ye," came assuringly from Levi. "Jest a tech o' snow-blindness. Allus comes on quick," and Vance, thus led, staggered on to the end of the road and the spot where they had first camped.

"Now sit down 'n' keep yer eyes shut," Levi directed after leading him to a bare rock. Then the two guides held a whispered consultation.

"It's jest this way," Levi next announced to Vance. "Thar's a storm brewin' fast. It'll start by sunset or by mornin', sartin. To camp here means bein' buried in snow mebbe one day, mebbe two. Now Larry Corrigan's is only four mile away. By pushin' on sharp we kin make it by dark. Kin ye stand it?"

"I will," declared Vance with determination ;

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"only you two must keep hold of my hands. It's all a white haze to me now." So they started anew.

What a final desperate push for life, almost, faced these three men! Six feet of snow under them, not a sign of shelter nearer than this lumberman's cabin. Darkness and probably snow less than three hours away. If his welcome light were not sighted ere that, all direction would soon be lost, and what then? To stagger blindly on until pelting snow, tornado blast, and bitter cold had done their fell work. Levi and John knew this even better than the blinded man they led. They knew, too, that if he gave out from exhaustion, it meant leaving him to his fate, or all sharing it.

Soon his steps began to lag, which retarded theirs. He was now totally blind, and fully conscious of the danger all faced if his legs failed.

"It's for Ollie, my two good friends, and my life," he kept thinking, to add courage and strength.

"Ye gotta keep goin', or we all die," John almost commanded, after two hours of this desperate struggle had passed. How anxiously both Levi and John now watched the white expanse ahead and the western sky for the first sign of twilight!

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Fine hard sleet now began to sting their upraised faces. A low hill rose before them. The light faded fast. All scattered scrub, rising above the white, undulating level, vanished. The stinging sleet came faster. Darkness and storm were upon them !

Then, reaching this hilltop, there below in the valley glowed a faint light !

They were saved !

How they now strode onward and downward with head and shoulders thrown back and joy-filled hearts ! How all pitched forward when a plowed path in the snow was unknowingly reached ! How they half scrambled up this path toward the welcome light, feeling their way on snow-shoes, and how a loud "Hello, hello," from John opened wide that cabin door, are but minor details of wilderness life that need no enlarging.

Then, almost falling at the feet of red-faced Larry Corrigan, they heard, "Howly Mother, but who be ye, out a night loike this ? Are ye lost ?"

"No, we are saved, thank God and you," exclaimed Vance as all three squatted upon the floor to untie their snow-shoes.

Good Larry, seeing their plight, next turned to a very stout woman. "Put on the pot wid pork and the dish of cold praties, 'n' the taypot too,

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Mag," he commanded. "Be gorry, these men must be stharved."

The bright lamp-light made Vance's eyes smart as if from pepper, so he once more tied his handkerchief over them. "What ails ye? Be ye blind?" questioned Mag. "Shure it's from the snow," she continued, "an' ye must soak 'em wid hot wather. I'll fix ye. Jest dab 'em wid yer hank'chef, slow and aisy," she added, handing him a cup of hot water.

While she set the table, Vance explained who they were and whence they came. Soon the three drew their chairs to the table once more to eat their fill of what tasted like ambrosia to them.

That night they slept on the floor with coats for pillows.

CHAPTER XIV

WITH Larry, his two horses, and a snow-plow, the Mills was reached the next morning, then Vance removed the bandage from his eyes and sought relief. A soothing lotion and smoked glasses soon helped, and, half-blinded still, he tried to read one of the letters awaiting him, but was unable to do so. He next paid his men up to December, with ten dollars extra for Levi and John, and they departed with Larry, carrying the wages of the other two men. In his room once more with seven letters unread, all Vance could do was bathe his smarting eyes and await returning sight. By noon he was barely able to read Ollie's fine writing, and the first letter astonished him for she said :

“ It has now been over four weeks since receiving your last letter dated November 15th and we are all very much worried. Uncle says you must have been buried in snow, or into the woods so far that you are unable to send letters out. Hope we shall hear from you soon. I am invited to spend my holiday vacation in the city with a dear

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schoolmate, now married, and shall leave here the day before Christmas."

Vance read the other one, dated three weeks previous, and a friendly reply to one of his, and then began to ponder. No mention of his declared intention of leaving the woods and calling upon her was made. He had sent that letter out by John with a manuscript for Sherman, and he failed to understand. Was it because she intentionally omitted mention of his plans, not wishing to see him either at home or in the city? And then jealousy flared up. "So be it, my dear Miss Iceberg," he said to himself. "It is quite evident I am nobody to you, so let it go at that." Then for a long jealous moment he looked at himself as he was.

"I can't really blame her," he declared, with more candor. "She only saw me during a three-days' visit, knows my financial status, just enough to live on myself, that I am now liable to go dead-broke on this mine scheme, and why should she show anxiety to see me? Those keen blue eyes and her self-control are answer enough." It was the lure of the green, as he had begun to call his "risk all" project. First the green wilderness that brought him to Uncle Terry's cabin. That

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first flashing green tourmaline came next, a forty-thousand-dollar pouch-full followed to be stolen ; and now he had risked all he could borrow and had saved in further quest. Beyond that, he had almost lost his life in leaving the woods, mainly to see this unresponsive maid. Was it all an unlucky lure that would wreck his life ? A hoodoo as it were ? And then some unaccountable impulse led him to look at himself in the mirror. What he saw was not reassuring, for a face shaggy from a four-weeks' beard, uncombed hair down to coat-collar, and blood-shot eyes confronted him, an almost hideous vision. He next glanced at his clothing, a corduroy suit patched in many places, torn in others, and covered with spruce-gum and dirt. "I can get a shave, haircut and some sort of a suit here," he reflected. "Thank God I've got my check-book and credit." Then he turned to his letters once more. The next were two from the Professor, but there was no mention of his promise to leave the woods in either. And then Vance was mystified, for he knew they, the Professor and Myra, would hail his return with joy. Those from Sherman were opened next ; two contained checks for less than a hundred dollars each, the third, one for over three hundred, and this message :

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"Enclosed find check for your last part-seven story, including your share of plate rights on the first write-up. Have not heard from you in three weeks. Why? Your Wilderness Life sketches are all fine and, I judge, true to life. Many papers are copying them, which is proof-positive of their merit. By the way, your fashionable stepsister, Blanche Rogers, 'phoned me the day after your first article appeared, and wanted to know if the story was true, and where a letter would reach you. For reasons you can guess, and knowing how you feel, I named Fort Kent. Keep your sketches coming. Want to run them six months longer, sure. Good luck to you."

Vance's spirits began to rise, for here was almost five hundred dollars in ready money, and evidence that many thousand people were reading, possibly enjoying, his stories. Sherman's letter proved this. "Wonder how Miss Iceberg likes them," came next to his mind, followed by a quick solution of her failure to reply to his last letter.

She had never received it! "Neither did the Professor get his," thought Vance. "Well, I am stupid." Then glancing at the three checks, he exclaimed, "Well, after all, my green hoodoo is panning out in one way. Almost a thousand dollars within four months is not so bad."

With vanishing jealousy, Vance thought of

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what day of the week or month it was, for he had lost all count of them. A hurried visit to the hotel office showed him that it was Tuesday, December twenty-second.

Ollie was to be in the city before Christmas!

Vance next recalled that the big general store and post-office contained a telephone, and hurried to that. "Nothin' doin'," a clerk responded to his request to use it. "Line's down 'count o' snow."

"Will the stage go out in the morning?" came next from the anxious one.

"Can't say," indifferently. "A gang of men with horses and snow-plow started from here yesterday morning. Probably 'nother is working up to meet them. We shall send mail out tomorrow morning by a carrier on horseback. I doubt if the stage will start for two days." And Vance groaned in spirit, for Christmas was only three days away. He once more thought of his seeming hoodoo.

"I can hire or buy a horse to ride out on," came next to the mind of this determined man, with Ollie in the city as an inducement. "I can 'phone Uncle Terry from Grindstone, or anywhere, and find her city address," and so he returned to sanity once more. A visit to the barber came next,

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a longer one with the now more obliging store clerk followed, and when Vance again looked into his mirror, he saw a new man.

"Coat fits like a meal-sack," he said, trying to adjust it. "Makes me look like a dressed-up lumberjack. All I lack for that garb is a red sweater." Then he went down to dinner with buoyant feelings. To see Ollie by Christmas morn was yet possible.

After dinner he hired a stout horse from the only stable-keeper in town, for by this time his name and cash payments had worked their magic.

"We'll fix ye O. K.," that "horsy" man said, with a smile. "Let ye wear a fur coat out, too. Ye'll need it. The stage'll lead the hoss back, 'n' ye kin pay any time you're comin' in." And Vance smiled at what good credit would do, and was also grateful that the Mills had no local paper, thus saving inquiries about his tourmaline mine.

He next strolled around the village, with his mind on the city and Christmas, and happened to spy two lynx and two bob-cat skins spread in the drug-store window with "For sale" tags on them. In an instant he was inside examining them. "How much?" he queried of the lady who had typed one story for him three months previous. The

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price seemed ridiculously low, considering that these valuable skins were silk-lined, with artificial eyes, so Vance bought three, one for each of the three people most in his thoughts. And after carrying his burden to his room, he once more read Ollie's letters and Sherman's last one.

"Isn't that Blanche a schemer without shame!" he laughed, sneeringly. "When I left the house not one of the three bade me good-bye. When I met the two sisters a month later, both saw me, but stared into store windows. Now after two years, Blanche reads about our tourmaline discovery and my probable fortune and falls over herself to write me. I'm going to send for that letter to see how shameless she is. Bah!"

Once more recalling those comforting checks and Sherman's letter, Vance consulted his watch, said, "Ten hours before bedtime," and sharpened his pencil again. He wrote the story of that desperate sortie out of the wilderness over thirty miles of snow six feet in depth, the pen they dug and covered beside a boulder to sleep in, the meals of fried pork and hardtack only; and then the last more than desperate finale, when he, snow-blinded, was led by his brave guides and saved at last. He wrote as he felt now, recalling those four hours of mental agony and physical exhaustion.

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How those courageous men, ever watching the coming night and storm, had dragged their blind burden step by step, until they pitched into an open doorway and welcoming light, scarce able to gasp. And among all the sketches Vance had so far written, none was more widely copied than this one.

Morning came, and an early start on horseback for Grindstone, twenty miles away, with Vance first riding, then walking to warm his chilled blood. Late that night he reached hotel and safety once more. To try the telephone came next, but, "Party don't answer," was all the consolation he obtained. He insisted on further calling with the same result, waited a quarter of an hour and tried once more, but without avail, and not until the next morning did he obtain the information in Aunt Lissy's quavering voice, "Uncle Terry's gone over to the Cape with Ollie," and finally that she was "goin' visitin' to Mrs. Walter Hale's on Beechwood Avenue." "Lord-a-massy, we thought you'd ben frozen to death," came in response to his declaration of who he was, and further inquiry of what the street number of this Mr. Hale's house was resulted in, "I dunno; she never told us. Be ye goin' to see her?"

That night while the Professor and Myra were

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sitting at their small tea-table with its holly-decorated chandelier, Vance walked in. What a welcome he received, how the questions were plied after he had joined them at table, and how the at-home-once-more feeling warmed his heart and shone in his face like the open grate!

"The past three and a half months seem like a wild dream to me, Myra," Vance said at last, "and they ended by being dragged into an Irishman's log cabin blinded by snow. Tell you all about it later. I've got to write a letter first." Then he excused himself, consulted the telephone directory, and went into the Professor's cozy library to write to Ollie: "Have just arrived in the city. May I call to-morrow evening? Please answer by special delivery to 22 Orchard Street," then stepped out and posted the letter.

"Do we get a Christmas-Day mail delivery, Myra?" he next queried, entering the sitting-room.

"Oh, yes, one in the morning," she answered, with a smile that ended in a laugh. "She will get your letter by nine o'clock. Did you give her our 'phone number?"

"No," he admitted, boldly, "but I asked her to answer by special," and then to head off further inquiry, unwrapped his three Christmas gifts, tossed one lynx-skin into Myra's lap, the bob-cat's

into the Professor's, and rolled up the other lynx-skin.

"And so Miss Ollie Oaks gets one, too?" Myra questioned after her own exclamations and thanks and with a broad smile. "Seems to me the romance is culminating faster than a stage drama. Shall you kneel on it and propose to-morrow evening, Vance?"

"No, but I would if I thought I had the ghost of a show to hear 'Yes.' Now tell me why you assume so much, Myra?"

"Why, my dear boy, you have told the whole story in few words and one act. Here you come to us after five weeks of unbroken silence, bring three beautiful rugs, swallow supper as if you had a train to catch, present us with two of them, rush to the 'phone to find her visiting address, write and post information of your arrival, and then to clinch your self-evident infatuation, ask me if mail is delivered in the morning. I knew that when you fell in love it would be all over, but this is like rolling off a roof." Then Myra vanished kitchenward.

That evening was a delightful one to these three friends; to Vance who told his long, romantic, desperate, and finally, almost tragic story, the more so to the Professor and Myra, who listened

spellbound. "I call it the lure of the green," Vance added. "A hoodoo that seems to follow me after finding that first big green tourmaline."

"But that is superstition ; just a mere fancy," rejoined Myra, half frowning. "And you ought to be above such a foolish notion."

"Of course, and so I am," returned Vance, "but you must admit that green has been an allurement to me from the day I first went into the woods. If it hadn't been for Peg-leg's theft and old Boreas trying to bury me under snow, I should never have thought of it."

It was noon the next day before an answer came from Ollie, and that only, "I shall be pleased to see you this evening."

CHAPTER XV

IN spite of his depravity there was a certain picturesque romance about Peg-leg's mode of existence. He had come to hate all human kind, to feel that they were in league against him and that he must prey upon them in return. There was also a reason for this, due entirely to his legal robbery by Job Ross in whose lumber camp Peg, or Joe Bonette, as known then, had worked. He had been virtually hired by an agent of Ross, yet, ignorant of law, had neither asked for nor signed any contract, nor been told what wages he should receive. A hunter and trapper by instinct, as well, Joe had partially continued this life while in camp. He set a few traps, visiting them Sundays, left his work now and then to shoot deer for use in camp, many of them in fact, yet aside from supplying much meat for the camp, had done about as much work as the rest. But after the spring drive was over and almost eight months' pay due Joe, Ross flatly refused to pay him one penny.

"You're not on my crew list," Ross had said to

him. "I've heard you was a sort of trapper 'n' hunter hangin' 'round my camp all winter, but as for pay, why, go chase yourself." And that was all the satisfaction Joe received.

He felt that he squared himself partially, later on, by cutting a boom of logs belonging to Ross on the St. Francis one night, and thus losing their owner thrice the amount of the unpaid wages in securing them. After that, Joe Bonette became an outlaw.

When he was released from jail and given the few dollars and a dozen tourmalines his pockets had contained, he first sold the latter for two dollars apiece, took train for Fort Kent, bought a thick winter jacket of fur-lined deerskin, a pair of snow-shoes, a few provisions, and last of all, a quart-bottle of "split" or alcohol mixed with cheap whiskey. Then he started for Squash Lake.

Arriving at his shack late the next afternoon, he first built a fire, then secured a rifle and ammunition he had hidden under long slabs of slate almost four months previous, and cooked and ate a bountiful supper with appetite sharpened by a long drink from his bottle. He had planned when spring came to take an old canoe, now bottom-up back of his cabin, repair it, secure his pouch of gems, and cross to Canada to his former home,



FAINTLY VISIBLE IN THE STARLIGHT HE SAW THE HOLLOW STUMP
APPEAR AS HE NEARED IT.—*Page 191.*



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the methods of executing the law in Maine not pleasing him. Then came his long-awaited-for consolation from his bottle beside his own fire with none to hinder.

How often Peg took a pull at it, how soon the drunken delirium followed, none ever knew, but within a short time there came a half-insane desire to cross the lake and bring his stolen pouch of gems back to the cabin.

He fortified himself with one more drink, staggered across the half-mile of lake with his eye upon the bushy point, faintly visible in the starlight, he saw the hollow stump appear as he neared it, and then, more drunken still, half crawled, half staggered up to its base. He pitched forward into the opening, and with mumbled curses at his jailers and the Holland woman, began to claw into the beaten-down snow within the stump.

While thus occupied, with oaths upon his lips, with a whirling delirium within his brain, two big yellow eyes glared down at him from above, and the next instant a long, striped, furry body dropped upon him, sharp claws pierced face and shoulders, and four long fangs sank deep into his throat.

CHAPTER XVI

IT lacked a few minutes of eight on Christmas night when Vance, bundle in hand, pushed the electric button beside the front door of Walter Hale's residence on Beechwood Avenue. An ebon-faced maid admitted him and Vance handed her his card for "Miss Oaks," then seated himself in a hall chair. In a moment a vision of faint pink beneath white lace, with the smiling face of Ollie, tripped down the hall stairs and a "Why, how do you do, Mr. Harper; I am very glad to see you," with extended hand, greeted him, and soon both were seated before an open fire in the parlor.

"Your note was a Merry Christmas greeting," she began, smiling. "But how changed you are! Why, you are as brown as an Indian."

"I looked more so four days ago," Vance replied, smiling back, "with hair down to my shoulders and clothing in rags. All I lacked was feathers and a red blanket."

"But how did you find I was here, and my address?"

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"Why, 'phoned your home for both, and in your last letter you said you were coming to the city."

"So I did"—after a pause—"but I had quite forgotten it. We were all worried at not hearing from you for so long, and your note this morning was almost like a voice from the tombs. Uncle said you must be all safe, however, and probably snow-bound."

"I was, by six feet of it, and it almost cost my life to get out on snow-shoes, thirty miles on them. But I wanted to see you."

And then, as Ollie flushed slightly, Vance felt it an opportune moment to present his gift. "Excuse me," he said, going into the hall and returning, "but I have made bold to bring you the scalp of one of our wilderness friends." Then he spread the lynx-skin at her feet.

"Oh, oh, how beautiful!" she exclaimed, "but I should faint at the sight of those eyes glaring at me in the woods. And you had it lined, too," she added, stroking the mottled fur. "It shall have the post of honor before my mirror, where you men say we spend most of our time."

"Some have reason enough for so doing," rejoined Vance.

"Tut, tut! Remember by implication only." Then placing a small smoking-table at his elbow

she added, "Now imagine yourself in your log cabin and tell me all about your wilderness life."

"But you have read it all in the papers, haven't you?"

"Of course, but I want it from you. By the way, your stories in the 'Argus' have made you quite famous, Dora says. She is Mrs. Hale; I am visiting her, and she was one of my school-mates for four years."

"Tut, tut! By implication only. Sauce for the goose, you know."

"But I didn't say so," smiling. "It was Dora."

"Stung," ejaculated Vance, also smiling. "I see you are as elusive as ever. But twice-told tales lack inspiration, you know. When I wrote those I was in the wilderness, where poetic fancies come easy."

"But aren't a bright fire, a good cigar, and a good listener enough?"

"Plenty. But I'd rather hear you talk. Remember, I snow-shoed thirty miles for the chance."

"That is just what I want to hear about. It has never been in the 'Argus.' "

"It will be in a few days."

"But I can't wait for that, so go on, please." And thus urged, Vance did go on from the morn-

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ing when, against the advice of his more wood-wise guides, he started on a foolhardy trip. He told the story better than he had written it, even, for his listener, with her charm of face and appealing eyes, was ample inspiration. But the real kernel of the tale began when snow-blindness came to him and then she sat with tense face, and eyes that never left his one instant. And when he came to that last half, with all its desperation, ending as it did, a little gasp of relieved suspense escaped her.

"But wasn't it a foolish thing to do, so to risk your life," she said reprovingly, "and against your guides' advice?"

"Probably, but you were the lodestone. And men will do foolish things for a woman, or to see one." Ollie flushed deeply at this outspoken admiration and turned to gaze at the fire. "I am satisfied with my reward," he added, watching her with a sense of satisfaction. "After three months of the life I have led, to have you one long evening ought to be enough for any man."

Ollie, feeling that he must think her a silly schoolgirl, faced him half defiantly, self-poised once more.

"Would you expect to find me in any way superstitious?" Vance queried after a pause.

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"Hardly, from what you have said. Are you?"

"Not in the ordinary sense. And yet from the outset of this venture of mine, the color of green has been the attraction. An invisible influence to lead me on. A hoodoo, as it were, with green eyes."

"Like the maid with milk-pail," remarked Ollie. "Was it that that lured you down to our green island, also?"

"Maybe, but all hoodoos have good and evil in them, I believe. If so, your island must be the good side."

"It may not prove so," she rejoined, more soberly, "if your convictions regarding the end of most illusions are true."

Vance glanced sharply at her impassive face, not sure whether this was meant as a hint or just badinage. "That may be another outcome also, I admit," now studying the fire, "but if my hopes are wrecked on your island, it will be my fault, won't it?"

"Won't that be true of your mining venture, also?"

"Not entirely, for luck has much to do with that, while the result of my hopes depends upon myself, doesn't it?"

"Why, yes and no," she answered, after a pause,

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"we are all like so many chips floating down the current of life, I fancy. We are tossed hither and yon by opposing currents and those sweeping around my island home may be too strong for you to overcome, and possibly also for myself."

"Well, some one has aptly said that hope is an altar stair leading up to God through darkness. So I shall continue on it. And now to change the subject, how long shall you remain in the city?"

"Just a week, and I am anticipating every moment," Ollie answered, smiling again.

"Well, I want you to meet the Professor and his sister. They are my two dearest friends, as I told you. I'd also like to arrange a theater party for that purpose. Will you and your two friends join us?"

"I will gladly, and I've no doubt they will. You might 'phone me to-morrow. How long do you remain in the city?"

"A week; possibly two. I've some business to see about. Then it's back to the woods again."

"To stay until spring, I suppose, and then to find tourmalines, I hope."

"Yes, my ever-green hope," answered Vance. "But that is my work in the future. Now it's a week of holidays. So let's forget that. I want

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to enjoy the week, and, more than that, to help you to do so. I shall also hope you will go to another entertainment with me, alone, so that we can discuss the play." Just then steps were heard, the door opened and Ollie's two friends entered. Of course, introductions followed and then Vance departed.

"Cool, calm, piquant, and charming as ever, my fair island maid," was the mental comment Vance made as he strode away to the nearest car line. "But I will win you yet, Miss Iceberg. I only wish you hadn't come here at all. And I devoutly hope that Hale family haven't any rich young fellows they want you to meet. Anyhow, I can watch out while you stay." Then he began to consider in how many ways he could make it pleasant for her during the week.

He would have had less reason to worry about the Hale family could he have heard their comments after his departure.

"So that is the fellow who discovered the rich mine and writes such thrilling stories, is it?" queried Mr. Hale. "He has a good strong face, and one I like. Better set your cap for him, Ollie."

But Mrs. Hale's comment was more to the point. "That man is in love with you, Ollie

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dear," she said, watching her face. "And you are a bit the same way, too, else you wouldn't have kept so still about him. Now own up, and tell me all about him." And Ollie had to in spite of the late hour. The lynx rug added its mite to what Ollie told, so Dora retired feeling sure that her schoolmate had a suitor worth while.

The theater party was arranged the next day, Vance secured a box for "The Music Master" for the following evening, and then went about his business. His first act was to buy a fifty-horse-power portable boiler on wheels, three thousand feet of inch-iron-piping, and two drilling-machines, also other needed equipment, all to be delivered at Grindstone by March first; payment, thirty days later. His next call was upon Sherman, and a pleasant one it was.

"I've brought you two more yarns," Vance announced, handing them to him.

"Good stuff, O. K.," was the brisk rejoinder as that busy man whirled around from his desk and passed Vance a box of cigars. "Glad to get 'em, too," he continued, now glancing over a few pages of one, then halted and began to read steadily while Vance enjoyed his cigar. The editor kept on reading, oblivious of Vance for fully ten minutes, until the last sheet was finished,

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then turned to his caller. "By George, was that true," he exclaimed, "and did you get blinded and have such a close call?"

"It's all true, every word, and as near to facts as I could describe them. I don't recall adding one word of color to any sketch."

"Well, keep 'em up; all good stuff. Lots of papers copying, and that is the kind we want. Satisfied with the price, are you?"

"Perfectly, and the promptness, too. But I have about exhausted my field," added Vance after a pause. "Hereafter it will be camp life, log-cabin building, and mining or drilling."

"Well, fake up some additions then, add one or two snow-storms that never came, get lost in the woods, anything to interest our readers. They want something exciting." After a few other questions, Vance bade that busy editor "Good-morning" and went away, realizing as never before what editing a paper meant.

That evening the firm of Moss & Harper balanced books, so to speak, when it appeared that up to date they had expended about fifteen hundred dollars, with nearly three hundred to pay April first.

"I deposited four hundred and ten dollars from the fifty-odd tourmalines you sent," the Professor next announced.

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"And I also deposited nine hundred and eighty dollars 'Argus' money," Vance added, then began to use his pencil again.

"Counting the cost of our men's wages and provisions up to April first," he next declared, "we shall have a balance of nearly nine hundred then, your savings bank deposit and mine still in reserve. I also have six hundred and eighty of my per annum now due. Guess we can pull through."

Just now with money prospects so fair, Ollie in the city, a delightful theater party soon to follow, the future looked bright to Vance and his green hoodoo vanished from his mind.

The theater party was all he expected, and more, particularly in one respect. Of course the three women occupied the front chairs, smiling or using lace-bordered handkerchiefs all through the "Music Master," chatting between the acts. After the first one, Vance, glancing down at the sea of faces below, saw an opera-glass pointed at their box by his stepmother, sitting between Blanche and Hortense. In an instant he leaned forward and whispered to Ollie: "Take your glass and look at the one leveled at us from sixth row left of center aisle. Those are the three feminine bandits I told you about." Ollie did so, saw the glass be-

low passed to Blanche, then to Hortense, and then Ollie handed her glass to Mrs. Hale and also advised Myra to use hers on the staring ones below.

It was a unique opera-glass duel, begun by the impertinent women, who continued it long after the ladies in the box had laid their glass aside. Vance, meantime, smiled in serene content, fully aware that his much-despised family connections had seen him call Ollie's attention to them and could draw their own conclusions.

"By Jove," he thought, "won't they be mad and won't they want to find out who Ollie is? Blanche must feel like thirty cents now, and if she wrote me, it's down to seven."

Supper at the most select café in the city came next, and while awaiting their orders, Ollie first broke a half-open rose from the bunch Vance had sent her and gave it to him, then selected two more for the other gentlemen. "It's been a delightful evening to me," she said, "one full of smiles and tears. I just couldn't help tears at one part of the play."

Myra's comment on the way home in the limousine Vance had hired for the evening is worth quoting. "Vance, my dear boy," she said, after the Hales and Ollie had been dropped, "if you

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let that girl escape you, I'll never forgive you. I don't wonder you've fallen so utterly in love with her. I have myself. And she is so unassuming, so unconscious of how beautiful she is. That is her greatest charm. And she is so keen, too, so easily sees all the fine points of a play. But that glass duel was too funny for anything. And how those brazen women kept it up, long after we lowered our glasses! Why, they even glared at us after the second act."

Vance, however, needed no spur from "Mother Myra." He telephoned for permission and made a family call upon Ollie and the Hales, once more to repeat his story to them, condensing it all he possibly could, taught Ollie to play bridge, or partially, and then the four played two rubbers, Ollie and himself losing, as might be expected, after which he went home in a trance. He sent the best candy and handsomest flowers to Ollie every day, escorted her to the theater once alone, then took both the Hales and her the next evening, and finally, as a conclusion, they invited the Professor, Myra and himself to a dinner party with cards and music afterward.

After the Moss family had departed, Mrs. Hale gave Ollie a few suggestions. "My dear girl," she said, "why don't you ask Mr. Harper to call

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to-morrow evening on you alone? You have only two more evenings left, and you certainly owe one to him. Why, he has spent money like water entertaining you. I will have something dainty for you to serve about ten o'clock, grape-fruit punch, cold chicken, lettuce sandwiches, spiced currants, and coffee. We will then make ourselves scarce and keep so until eleven. As I understand, he won't see you again until spring. Unless you wish to hold him aloof you ought to give him a few hours of consolation. How is it, Ollie?"

"Why, yes, I admit all you say," returned Ollie, soberly. "Mr. Harper has entertained me most delightfully, made the week pass like the wind, and one I shall never forget. For that I feel deeply indebted. But if I asked him to pass an evening so planned and alone with him, he must inevitably think I did so for a purpose, and I just couldn't do that. I like Mr. Harper very much as a friend. He is a splendid man. But you know how I am situated at home, almost bound to Uncle Terry while he lives. I must not even think of marrying, or allow myself to fall in love."

"Oh, fiddlesticks; that's all nonsense! Your uncle, from all I hear, would be the last man to

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keep you from securing a good husband and home when the chance came. The question is, do you or do you not want to pay the social debt you owe Mr. Harper? Be as cool as you please, only show him you appreciate all the theaters, flowers, and suppers he has showered upon you." And thus cornered, Ollie consented.

She arose early the next morning, and wrote Vance one of her brief but pertinent missives. "As Mr. and Mrs. Hale are going out this evening, I shall be left alone and would be pleased to have you call. I will talk illusions with you all you wish, sing if you insist, and especially I want to thank you for all you have done to make my week's visit so delightful."

This made Vance feel repaid for all he had done. "But no love-making," he said to himself, "or else she will feel that I think she invited me for that purpose. And I know she did not. It isn't her way."

CHAPTER XVII

AS expected by Vance, Ollie received him in her usual calm yet cordial manner, like a valued friend and no more. "As I probably shall not see you again for many months," she said, after placing the smoking-table at his elbow, "I want to hear about your plans and prospects first. After that we will have a word-duel upon any subject you wish. I have also a few old songs I bought for Uncle, which I will try out on the dog, alias yourself. If you can stand them without barking he will." And thus encouraged Vance began.

"My plans are few and simple," he said. "I left orders with Levi, my foreman, to dig out first. That means construct a camp snow-plow of small logs pinned together like a deep letter V with cross-bars, on which they will carry two tents and provisions for man and beast. To this they will harness both horses in single file and with shovels to aid the four men, I suppose they have now dug a path out. I am certain I shall never again risk my life on snow-shoes. After I go back, we shall

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build a big log cabin for the men, a smaller one for the horses, and when spring comes, bring in the machinery. I may find time to take a few days off. If I do, I shall run down to call on your uncle and maybe get a lobster to eat. And there you are."

"I am glad you will not try the snow-shoe way out again," replied Ollie, looking relieved, "while as for the lobsters, I will see that you have plenty of them. I've got to pay my social debt to you in some way."

"No debt at all. I have enjoyed the week more than you can possibly have done. In fact, it was just for that I took the chance. I was positively homesick for the city, and four months of wilderness life would make any man feel so."

Vance then mentioned books. "Oh, yes, they were about all the friends I had for four years," Ollie answered, "and what a medley I read. Now it's mostly novels, and do you know they seem to grow more vapid and dull each season. A really charming story, one that compels your interest from the first page and holds it, is a rarity. I want a book full of smiles, with a few tears mingled in, like the play of the 'Music Master,' for instance. But how few authors are blessed with that art. Most of them begin a novel with some startling incident, or else a long scenic de-

scription into which the hero or heroine finally enters. After that, the writer appears to wander around in a fog and introduces new characters and inane conversations that have no apparent bearing upon the narrative. And so one has to force himself to read chapter after chapter with the faint hope of finding one bit of humor or one touch of real human feeling. I can't understand why so many dull, worthless, and even indecent novels find a publisher. I have been deceived so many times by advertisements claiming everything for a book that I feel shy of all advertised books. I believe a novel should be bright enough to win its own way from merit only."

"True enough, but we are now living in an age of loud shouting from the housetops about everything. One cannot ride through a charming stretch of country without seeing bill-boards by the thousand and every barn practically screaming the merits of something. And the more attractive a bit of natural scenery is, the more it is plastered with ads. A city's streets show the same loud clamoring from a glare of electric signs blinking and flashing until one is almost blinded by them. And so it is with books, and the more worthless they are, the louder their merits or rather demerits are shouted."

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"But the illusion of such books soon vanishes when one tries to read them," said Ollie.

"I never found they contained any illusions," rejoined Vance in a sarcastic tone. "Only so many pages of white paper, ink-stained and thus wasted. The words, 'The End,' are the only interesting ones. But, to change the subject to illusions in general, do you know, I believe they are our best assets after all. Hope is the foundation of them, of course, yet what good would hope do us without illusions? Take the lives of most for example. Those who never can earn more than a bare living. If they did not hope that some day a gold-laden ship would sail into the port of their lives, how long would it be before they would fall hopeless by the wayside? And yet, that hope always has been and always will be an illusion to the vast majority. Even in our daily life, petty illusions play a leading rôle. The doctor looks you over, smiles, assures you that you have gained quite a bit, yet has lied to you in so saying. But he has produced an illusion that cheers you for hours in spite of pain."

"And you believe such white lies are best?"

"Most assuredly. Don't you?"

"Why, in such cases, yes. In most, I should say the truth is best."

"But if the truth discourages or humiliates us, what then?"

"Well, I still say I prefer the truth in all things, except, perhaps, the doctor's white lies."

Vance smiled, believing he was winning.

"Some cynic once said," he next asserted, "that it is folly to tell women truth; they prefer lies so long as they be sweet. Now let us assume you were homely, ill-tempered yet vain. How would you feel if anybody told you so?"

"Why, only sorry they cherished such malice," replied Ollie, pleasantly, following his current of thought. "Unless she is stupid, every woman knows her own shortcomings. To be told of them is needless, and for another to say needless things, voice unpleasant truths, shows an evil intent, malice, in fact. Many of our sex do prefer sweet lies, I admit. Most who have any pretense of beauty enjoy being told of it. But do they gain in the average man's opinion? Do you admire a woman any more because she beams and smiles in serene joy when you flatter her? You know you are flattering. She knows it, too, yet by accepting it with a grateful smile she proves herself either a fool or a hypocrite. And what man respects either? I have noticed, too," she added, "that most men enjoy flattery fully as much as

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women. Not about their personal appearance or dress, but their ability and success in life. Your cynic's sneer is the truth in most cases. I would suggest another, and that is, you can't tell a man the truth unless you wish to exasperate him. And the ease with which a man can be flattered is almost laughable, to say nothing of the way he can be 'landed,' as you call it, by a designing woman."

"You're even with me, all right," rejoined Vance with a rueful smile, thinking of how he came to be disinherited. "And I guess it's a case of about so on both sides."

"You must remember, also," continued Ollie, now meaning to give him a full measure of retort, "that nature, aided by you men, has debarred women from nearly everything except their good looks and dress for attractions. Few, except they be old and passé, ever push ahead in business, or are ever allowed to do so by men. Those who have ability are avoided by you as strong-minded and undesirable for mates. It is men who want most of us to be the dependents, the clinging and confiding sort, desirable for wives. And most women consider a husband as the main object in life."

"And isn't it, or should it not be so?" retorted

Vance, conscious that she had the better of the argument.

"Why, possibly, according to natural laws, and woman's primitive condition as the slave of man. I think women have had to lift themselves up to man's level by sheer force of charm and tact. They certainly were servile enough in the long ago. Pitiably so, in fact. And by their own efforts only have they attained to their present, almost deified status, where they are gallantly protected by their erstwhile masters."

"But to go beyond that, to wish to rule man in addition to winning him," persisted Vance, "won't they unsex themselves?"

"Of course, and no wise woman will do that, for she realizes that the best life can give her is a loyal and tender man to lean upon." And then Ollie gazed into the glowing grate as if wondering what the outcome of her own life would be, while Vance could not help staring at her admiringly. The longer he contrasted her youthful charm and her sweet face, with her keen mind and ability in terse argument, the more of a surprise she became. And she was so unassuming, so utterly unconscious of all her charms. She combated him in argument, showed herself his superior in many ways, yet not by even one

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glance of triumph did she show her victory. She showed no sign of being strong-minded, either. Only a young lady, well-poised, calm and serene, who enjoyed discussion for its own sake, and not to crush him or elevate herself at cost of his discomfort. And she was logically correct in all her deductions. The more fully Vance realized her mental powers combined with her alluring charm and beauty, the more in love he grew. "But no word of it as yet," he thought, "not a hint, even."

After a long pause he said, "How about my promised songs, Miss Oaks? We have discussed illusions, also both feminine and masculine foibles, and the dog is ready to become a song target."

But no "yowl" followed Ollie's rendering of "Down where the water-lilies grow," or others of similar kind, followed by solos from light operas, after which she excused herself. Soon the ebon-faced maid brought a small folding table, covered it with a white spread, and soon "something dainty" was between the two. And this, the first tête-à-tête lunch they had ever eaten, was recalled by Vance many times after in the woods. Then came the two easy-chairs beside the open fire once more, and while Vance smoked contentedly, Ollie chatted on about the plays they had enjoyed,

criticising or praising them in her terse way. An alluring picture she was to Vance, now smiling at her, most willing to hear her talk. How every detail, her questioning blue eyes long-lashed, her piquant nose, tempting lips, with two dimples midway between lips and rose-tinted cheeks, while above lay glossy brown hair with a few wee curls in front of her ears, now enthralled him. How her face lit up when she talked. And so the evening ended without one hint of love from the cautious Vance.

"I shall see you at the train," he asserted as Ollie offered her hand at the door, "and many thanks for the most delightful evening I ever passed. I shall recall it many times."

He was at the depot in ample time to secure Ollie a chair located midway, and brought her two novels that he knew were interesting. "My best regards to Aunt Lissy and Uncle Terry," he said after escorting her to her seat, "and tell him I shall hope to sit beside his cheery fire inside of three months." Then he waited outside with Mrs. Hale until the final hand-wave came from Ollie and the train rolled away.

CHAPTER XVIII

AS Vance had expected, Levi and the men had plowed a narrow path down lake and stream so that when Vance reached the Mills the way into the wilderness was open. Here he found a letter from Blanche dated three months previous, and forwarded from Fort Kent. True to Vance's estimate of her, she had written eight pages of fulsome congratulations upon his good fortune, adding that they had all missed him.

"Mamma and Sister send their best love," she concluded, "and won't you please come and see us when you return? You will be more than welcome, and to me especially."

"Yes, and a possible chance to inveigle me, too," sneered Vance. Had it not been dishonorable, he would now have enclosed this missive to Ollie. He wrote her a long letter that evening, "probably the last for many weeks," as he said, and next morning started for camp on horseback, this time with a boy on another to return both horses. He arrived late that afternoon, found work had progressed well, a log stable built for

horses, snow all cleared away from around the cabin, and for further consolation a big buck hanging inside the small tent. Pip, the inveterate fisherman, had brought his dog, Bob, in, also cut holes in the ice and a big string of trout, now frozen, hung from the tent-pole. A backwoods banquet was soon ready, and that evening Levi and Vance discussed plans for the winter's work, after which the latter filled his pipe once more and watched the bright fire.

But somehow those cheery flames lacked their usual inspiration, and contrasting his present surroundings with the last evening with Ollie, Vance felt a sense of utter loneliness. The fire was brighter and more romantic. Guns and fishing-rods hung above it. The tinware on the table was washed and shining. The four men, wearing brown or red shirts and moccasins, reclining upon blankets before the fire, looked picturesque ; and Vance knew when morning came, grilled venison, fried trout, with all "fixin's" would be prepared for breakfast, and six months ago he would have felt this the acme of camp life ; now it had lost its charm, and all because a sunny face with tender eyes and red lips kept intruding.

"And I've two months of this," Vance thought, now sighing, "with maybe two or three letters

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from her meantime to break the monotony. Hang it all, when a man falls in love he has certainly let himself into a lot of heartache and worry."

Two weeks of actual lumber-camp life came next, with no more exciting incident than a few night visits from a lynx or bob-cat prowling around the cabin, and then Pip, when sent out for supplies, brought a letter from Ollie.

"I arrived home safely," she wrote, "but have had the blues ever since. And how changed everything seems! The Cape houses looked like so many white and brown huts, almost, as I first saw them home coming. My schoolhouse was a mere brown hovel, and the lighthouse beyond a tall, grim monument. Even my own pretty home, I once thought so big and beautiful, had dwarfed in size to a very small cottage. How can things change so in one week? And the evenings home are so dull and monotonous. Uncle, as usual, smokes, watches the fire while now and then I read to him, until, as often happens, he falls asleep. Auntie knits, the ocean keeps up its perpetual crashing and booming, while I try a book, but that fails to drive away my megrims. I try the piano or some of the old songs, but they seem full of tears. And so I sit and think, think, and the waves keep saying 'dead and gone, dead and gone,' more solemnly than a tolling bell. I guess one reason for my melancholy mood is the fact that a pupil of mine, a dear little girl I loved, died

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four days ago and was buried in a small black coffin. Think of it! I cut and carried all the buds and blossoms from my window plants to lay upon it, but they were a pitiful show, and more so because the only one. I cried myself to sleep that night, while those waves kept up their mournful monotone.

"Of course I enjoyed my visit to the city very much more because you entertained me so nicely. And for that I want to thank you again. But I almost wish I had never gone, it has made life here so much more dull and desolate. Another matter I have thought about very often, and that is your belief and assertion that life is only one long succession of illusions to end in the greatest of all, the Promised Land illusion. I can't and I won't believe that. Why, life would be hopeless without that faith! You did not exactly class that with your other illusions, I admit. Only let it be inferred. But I must close this sad letter. Am almost inclined to throw it into the fire."

Vance, reading between the lines, almost believed a faint longing for him was interwoven.

"Good Lord," he said to himself, "that poor girl will go crazy down there beside the lonely ocean. Better by far that she had never known anything else. And what a fool I was to talk illusions to her! It has only added to her gloom." Then he tried to see her life as it was. No kin on earth. A few score of poor, kindly, simply fisher-folk, far apart from her, to mingle with. A chilly

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wave-tossed ride back and forth daily, to earn enough for clothing, and two kind-hearted old people for sole companions. "By Jove," he added, "if our mine pans out as I hope, and she will only consent, I'll buy that island of Uncle Terry if I can, put up a modern house and live there the year round. I guess that would be the only way to win her."

The winter weeks now dragged their slow course for Vance. The larger log cabin, divided into two rooms, gradually arose beside the old one, and between that and the lake. The days grew longer, the sun warmer, the snow, aided by one or two rains, was lowering, and spring once more seemed within sight. Meantime, three more letters from Ollie, one or two weeks apart, came to him, each in her usual vein, with no mention of "blues." Several checks also came from Sherman, and letters from the Professor and one from Myra.

She wrote her usual motherly letter, and concluded with, "My dear boy, you can't realize how much we have missed you lately, or how often I have thought of that sweet island girl with her sunny smile and modest ways. Do please hurry and find a lot of tourmalines and then bring her to live in the city. I am so impatient to see how she will look as a bride."

But all winters pass slowly and surely, as this one did, and when March came, Vance, Levi, and John, with horses and sled, started for the Mills, there to hire a larger sled, go on to Grindstone, load the boiler, machinery, drills, and piping ; then back to camp.

The return trip was to be made by Levi and John, while Vance meant to keep on to the Cape. This trip out and loading took three days, then Vance called on a barber, clothed himself in civilized dress once more, and boarded a train with keen anticipation of one or two evenings at Ollie's house. He knew he would not have one moment alone with her. That even a hint of love would be unwise as yet. That a long and cautious approach to her heart was his only chance, and knowing this, he felt that even to see, speak with her, or hear her sing, would be Heaven to him.

He was fortunate, too, after the long mud and slush-impered ride down the island, to find the *Telly* beside the wharf with Uncle Terry and Ollie waiting inside the post-office and store for a package and mail. Ollie met him and shook hands with smiling, slightly flushing face, and "This is a surprise." Uncle Terry grasped his hand with a "Wal, I'm glad to see ye. How be ye?" then adding, "I've ben 'spectin' ye 'long

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now fer quite a spell, 'n' we got a car full o' lobs 'longside the wharf all ready. We'll hev some br'iled fer supper." And soon he was steering his boat out into the tossing waves with Ollie and Vance in the stern, now and then feeling a spin-drift of salt spray splash upon their faces.

"It's glorious," declared Vance, "and not nearly as cold as I expected." Then, as the boat slowed up alongside the floating wharf, he leaped out, grasped and held it, then extended one hand to Ollie.

"Go right up, 'n' don't wait fer me," Uncle Terry directed. "I've got the lobs to fetch up."

Then Vance clasped the white-clad arm of Ollie and thus assisted her up the icy stairs. He kept hold of that arm until they reached the cottage, as if he owned it, then opened the door to let her enter first. He shook hands with Aunt Lissy; Ollie threw off her white sweater and red mob-cap, vanished kitchenward, tripped up the back stairs with a pitcher of hot water, lit a fire in a small stove full of kindling and wood she had kept waiting for weeks in their guest-chamber, then down the front stairs to announce, "Your room is ready, Mr. Harper, the same one as last time."

When Vance saw and heard that stove with its warm greeting he smiled. "By Jove, but she was

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spry, and all for me," he thought, then, "No, it's all her hospitality." And so it was—most of it.

The big platter of hot broiled lobster that next greeted him was attacked without ceremony after Ollie had said, "Please help yourself, sir." And that meal, with butter on the delicious lobster meat, hot coffee, bread and butter, with room for naught else, was one Vance long remembered.

Of course, the fireside smoke-talk, with Vance recounting his experiences to Uncle Terry, came next. Later Ollie entered the room, wearing the same pale-pink and lace gown she had on when he had first met her in the city. "Take this, please," he said rising and pointing to the fireside chair which he had occupied. "I want to imagine myself back to you know where."

"But isn't this fire as cheerful?"

"More so, for this is of real wood that glows and sparkles, while that was slow-burning coal, with no rise and fall in unison with the wind."

"I enjoy this best," she answered, evidently wishing to avoid his direct reference to her dress, "and you know," she continued rapidly, "that I fancy our spirits, our thoughts, our moods, even, are shaped by trifles. For instance, a blind man I saw selling pencils in the city gave me a few moments of sadness and led me to contrast at

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once that ragged man's fate with that of the two fur-clad ladies I next met. Now this fire with its good spirits is in constant combat with the gloomy monotone of the ocean outside."

"Our lives are a continuous succession of moods, I admit," rejoined Vance as a faint whistle of wind made the flame glow brighter. "What you should do is to avoid cause for the gloomy ones and see only the cheerful things about you."

"But how can you?" said Ollie, combative once more. "How can anybody shut his eyes to blind pencil-sellers, ragged beggars, and want and suffering all around? How could I escape following that little black coffin I wrote you about, and shedding the tears I did? One would be heartless if he could. And, by the way, I felt sorry for a week after for writing you the letter I did, so full of gloom and my own sorrows."

"You have no need, and I was glad to get it, for it was the first and only one that disclosed your inner soul, your real feelings, your heart, as it were."

"Yet no one wants that sort in this world. It's 'laugh and the world laughs with you' all around. Sometimes I feel that any one, a woman more especially, who is born with a soft heart is only born to suffer. I really think the callous ones, the selfish ones, enjoy life best."

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"And so does a pig," returned Vance bluntly. "He eats, grunts, sleeps, eats again, and so on until one instant's pang from a knife-thrust ends it all. And he doesn't even have to worry about that knife. Doesn't even know that there is a knife in the world, while we borrow trouble all through life. Most of this trouble never happens. Now remember, my dear friend, that with the capacity to suffer comes an equal one to enjoy as keenly. Tender hearts, while they may never suffer, will enjoy what calloused ones never can. Take, for instance, my esteemed stepmother, whose sole thought is to get money and gratify herself, or make a show with it, do you imagine she would feel pity for a blind mendicant? Not a bit of it. On the other hand, if she ever saw beauty in flowers, brooks, birds, daisy-dotted meadows billowing beneath the winds, the moon's silvered path, anything charming in nature, I should faint. All she feels is brutal selfishness or envy. You saw her glaring at you in the theater? That was envy, malicious envy. And I took particular care to let them see you were my especial guest there."

"And why?"

"Will you stand the truth without hitching?"

"I will; go on," smiling at his odd way of putting it.

"Well, because you were the most beautiful girl in that theater, while any one of the three would curdle milk if she looked into the pitcher."

"Now remember"—flushing pink—"I said by implication only."

"But you also said 'go on,' and it's said. I won't retract it. And, by the way, I received a long, almost nauseating missive from Blanche, two months ago and written just after the 'Argus' blazoned our mine discovery, but omitted to state we had had forty thousand dollars' worth stolen. She congratulated me, of course, but filled five pages with a mawkish plea for me to come home and be good. She showed plainly that she wished to lasso me if she could. Why, I believe she would actually propose to a man if he had enough to support her on. Sherman, that's the editor of the 'Argus,' told me she 'phoned him to obtain my address, that is, after first asking if the story were all true. He, knowing the inside facts, told her Fort Kent, so I would not get the letter. But she did write the next day. Wasn't losing any time, you see. I wrote for it three months after, paid twenty cents dues, but was glad to do so."

Ollie smiled at his earnest statement of wholly undisguised dislike.

"I heard your family history, some of it, from Dora. That is, how you were disinherited. It seems a friend of hers knew all about it." She had heard more than that, a rather caustic criticism of his father, but naturally refrained from quoting it. "Some one has aptly said," she continued smiling, "that God gives us our relations, but, thank Heaven, we can pick our friends. And I guess that is your feeling. Never mind, when your mine yields a fortune, as I so hope it will, you can exult over your hated relatives in fine shape. Maybe you will have a change of heart by then and marry poor Blanche out of pity." And a smile twinkled over Ollie's face.

"I'll do better than that if I can," rejoined Vance boldly. "I'll marry the girl I love if she can be coaxed to take the chance." And then Ollie, rising quickly, fled to the piano, while two heart-throbs came to her. One, a strange, sweet thrill, the other, a keen sharp pain and dread. And what a medley now rippled from her fingertips! A passage from one of Sousa's marches, a dreamy bit from a Straus waltz, one from the "Merry Widow," then back to the "Mocking Bird," and so on with strains from a dozen old-time songs, to end with the good-bye song as sung by Melba.

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"There," she exclaimed, now whirling around with a calm, sober face, "that's how I feel, the last one, I mean, and I just had to pound it out. Hashed it, I guess you will think, Mr. Harper," and then resumed her seat, smiling and suave as ever. And then another daredevil impulse came to her.

"Do you remember that young minister in Bristol, the one who preached your line of thought about illusions?" she said, smiling. "Well, he lost his position, so I heard. They said he was preaching heresy of the rankest kind."

"And so he was, on that day, to them," rejoined Vance, failing to catch the drift of her mind. "As I recall, he had a poet's face. I rather liked him. And his sermon made me sit up and cease watching you."

"Then he builded more wisely than he knew," smiling.

"Perhaps—for you. But why do you say that?"

"Only because he—he used to watch me furtively, just as you did. And we played golf; he taught me. He was a nice boy, just a boy, it seemed to me. And he wrote me letters, nice boyish ones, until I finally told him they must end. I just won't let any man fall in love with

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me if I can help it." And then as if a long pent-up confession was out, she leaned her face upon one hand and watched the dying fire. And just then the tall clock chimed ten, and Uncle Terry roused up.

"Guess I must 'a' dropped off," he said. "Ben playin', hain't ye, Ollie? I sorter dreamed I heard a band, 'way off." Then, smiling at Vance, he continued, "It's goin' to be warmer to-morrow. Sun set red, 'n' wind's south, 'n' with a reefer ye won't feel a mite cold watchin' me pull pots. 'N' in the arternoon, we'll dig a mess o' clams at low tide. I know jest the spot. They'll taste good to ye, out o' the woods."

"But I had planned to leave in the morning," declared Vance. "Our machinery will be in by the time I get back, and it's work for me now. I only ran down for one good meal of lobsters and to see you all." And just then Ollie looked up.

"We should all like to have you stay longer," she said as her eyes fell, "and I know just how to fry clams."

That settled it.

But when Vance reached his room and thought over the events of the evening, he wasn't quite so sure of Ollie, after all.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next day, as Uncle Terry predicted, was a warm spring one and much enjoyed by Vance, to whom the sea was now a blessed change. Ollie was serene and smiling as ever and as if her madcap fit of the evening previous was a bygone illusion. The breakfast of lobster stewed in butter with bits of pork was delicious, and after it was over Uncle Terry and Vance took Ollie over to school, and then went out around the island to pull the dozen pots. For dinner came broiled lobsters again, next the clam flats, and finally a run to the Cape for Ollie. On the way home, Vance noticed she carried an unusually large hand-bag.

"My meal-sack, I call it," she said in response to his look. "You see I tried getting dinner over to the Cape, but nothing tasted quite like home food, so now I carry my dinners."

"Cold eating, isn't it?"

"Oh, no, the only thing I miss is a cup of tea or coffee. I like them both." And then Vance thought of something.

"Will you mind,—I mean will you let me send you a thermos bottle? The kind that keeps anything hot all day."

"Why,—er—I thank you, but I—I—yes, I shall be very glad to accept one."

Little did Vance realize then how this girl had lain awake for hours the night previous, fighting the first hard battle of her life. How her sense of obligation to Uncle Terry had been put in one scale, her own situation, heart, life, almost, in another. And how not until this moment, out there upon the tossing waves, had his simple thought for her comfort enabled her to decide.

"I cannot leave Uncle Terry," she had said to herself many times that night, as often before. "It is not right to let *him* go on this way, learning to love me. He is a strong man, and so brave, yet he can control himself, and will do so until he sees some sign of a response in me. But it must be a long way off, and it shall be."

What she had said about the young minister had been said purposely. Her flight to the piano was to hide her telltale face from Vance's eyes, and now, so wayward is a woman's heart, that as he clasped her arm to aid her up the icy stairs and so holding it onward, had he slipped his around her, gathered her into his arms, in fact,

she might have yielded. But he did not, nor had he the faintest idea that this was an opportune moment.

After supper, while the old folks were in the kitchen, Ollie brought a basket of wood, added two sticks to the fire, and sat down near Vance. "You must pardon my curiosity," she said, smiling, "but how did you dare write that long account of your tourmaline discovery? I have often thought it must have resulted in much annoyance to both of you."

"It did," laughed Vance, "but the Professor got most of it. I've had many a laugh at his descriptions of how the promoters chased him."

"And what are promoters? Men who wanted to buy the mine?"

"No, sharpers, schemers, who wanted to use it to sell a half-million watered stock on. To fleece fools, so to speak. But I would not allow my name to be so used," and he then explained at length how these almost thieves do their nefarious work. "My sole reason for giving that write-up," he continued, "was because Sherman, the editor of the 'Argus,' offered me five hundred dollars for it and we needed the money." Then, seeing sympathetic interest in his listener's eyes, Vance explained in full his financial situation, including

how he had pledged his motor-boat to obtain working capital. "I stand to win a fortune or lose every dollar. If I lose, I shall not whimper; I am still young, full of grit, have a good education, and no man in my position should fear anything except ill-health." And then Ollie smiled admiringly.

"Did you ever hear of the three disgraces?" she said, now flitting from one subject to another as was her wont. "Well, I was one for months," she continued, laughing at the recollection. "You see, it was this way. There were two other girls at boarding-school with me, Dora Dale, that's Mrs. Hale now, and Lucretia Green. She's the Mrs. Miner I visited in Bristol and both were very pretty. We got to be quite chummy the second year, and finally managed to obtain one big room with three single-beds in it. After that one of the lady teachers nicknamed us, 'The Three Graces,' and the other pupils made a pun of our names and called us the 'Greendale Oaks.' They were very strict at the school, and no one was allowed to go down-town shopping or out walking without a chaperon, and all that. And to be caught writing or receiving a note from a fellow meant no walks for one or two weeks. Well, Lucretia, Luke we called her, had an admirer,

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Fred Miner, a clerk in one of the stores. Of course they exchanged notes by means of a cord and letter-clip she lowered from our window after 'lights out' time. And the signal was Fred's whistling a strain from 'My Alabama Coon.' The next May a circus was billed to visit the town, and as none of us three had ever seen one, we were just crazy to go. And we did, three of us, in the afternoon with tickets Fred bought us. We were punished, of course, an awful scolding before the school by the principal, who called us the three disgraces, and no walks for two weeks. But it was worth it," concluded Ollie, laughing.

Later and after Uncle Terry had called for old songs, Ollie sang "My Alabama Coon," as if in memory of her school days. Somehow, Vance felt himself more at home here now, and when the parting came in front of Ollie's schoolhouse, her hand lingered just one instant longer in his, or so Vance thought. And the "Good-bye, and write me how the mine comes on," seemed a little more cordial than usual.

But there was one fly in the ointment for Vance, in the shape of a young poetic face leaning over a pulpit and preaching as if his life were at stake.

"And so she played golf with him, took walks, probably, and exchanged letters, eh?" he said to

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himself with a pang as he rode up the island. "And why did she make that naive confession, so to speak? I didn't bring up the matter. And close it with an assertion she would never never let herself love any man? She is the most fascinating, piquant, and exasperating girl I ever met or heard of, and past understanding. Now tender, now combative, saucy, almost, and then looking and speaking as if her heart were full of unshed tears."

There were a few real ones in her eyes two days later, when in the seclusion of her room she read, for the second time, a pathetic letter from the young minister.

"I am now succeeding in my new church far better than I hoped," he wrote, "and now and then receiving a few words of commendation from the church pillars. And how pleased my mother is, you cannot realize. I have, as you wished, ceased writing you for over two months, and have done my very best to forget you. But I cannot do it. Your face haunts me all the time. I see it in my dreams, in church, on the golf-links, in the moonlight, and always the most winsome face to me that God ever created. I try to catch one strain of your voice when the choir rises, but, alas, I never do. I see your pretty village as you have described it to me. I see your little brown school-house, the placid harbor, the row of houses fring-

ing it, the tall lighthouse beyond, and, most charming of all, your own pretty cottage home on the island. I am not going to ask you to answer this letter. I only wrote it to show you—may I say it?—my heart.”

“Oh, why did I do it? Why did I ever write him at all?” Ollie thought with a pang as she returned the letter to its envelope. “And yet they were pleasant, friendly letters without a hint that I even cared to receive an answer. And he won’t get one to this, not one word,” she said rising. “I’d feel almost guilty now to write him.” Then she tore the missive into four parts and dropped them into the stove.

Two weeks later came a more personal encounter in the cross-purpose current of her life and in the shape of a letter from Mrs. Miner, or “Luke,” as she signed herself. “I am going to Bath this week,” she wrote, “to see mother and spend Sunday with her. Now you positively must come up Saturday. Mamma will be delighted to see you, as she always is, and I—well, I’ll eat you up.

“Besides I’ve a lot of news for you, all about Bristol’s pious ones, and the boy preacher who lost his place. He who taught you golf and made eyes at you in church, so they said.”

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And Ollie flushed at the implication, for she had never been conscious of his so doing. She made her plans, however, notified her pupils that they could have Monday out and make it up the following Saturday, and went to Bath as invited. As might be expected, the evening with her former schoolmate was a delightful one with many exchanges about school days and the "three disgraces." When the morning church-bell came Ollie and her friends obeyed it as she expected. What a surprise came to both after the organ's soft prelude, when who should rise in the pulpit but the same young minister they had talked about the evening previous !

Ollie felt herself grow hot and cold by turns. She finally controlled herself, bowed with the rest, rose and held one end of a hymn-book with "Luke," but never one note escaped her lips. Neither did she once raise her eyes to that preacher's face.

"My, but what a surprise !" Luke almost gasped as they walked away from church. "Mr. Deane, our minister, must have exchanged with him. And he saw us, too," she continued, nudging Ollie. "I caught him looking at us twice. If he can find who mother is he will call this evening, sure as the sun sets. What excuse can we

make to leave you alone with him in the parlor, Ollie? Of course, his call will be upon you."

"If you leave us alone one moment, I will never forgive you, Luke, never, never," Ollie snapped. "I will stay in my room unless you promise that." And then, perforce, Ollie had to tell the whole story. "I am never going to write him again, not once," she concluded with. "I am awfully sorry for him, of course; he was such a nice boy. But I don't love him, and never can, and that settles it."

"But you might continue to exchange letters; no harm in that. And he is such a nice young man, so refined, and so eloquent in the pulpit. Now why don't you"—insinuatingly—"just try to feel kindly toward him? Or is there some one else, Ollie? Maybe the fellow you said kept watching you in church. And, by the way, Letty Marlowe told me his name was Harper and he inquired who you were. Oh, you sly puss!" she added, watching Ollie blush, "I see it all now. And you are smitten, too."

But Ollie answered never a word.

A moment later another way of escape occurred to Ollie. "Why can't you and I go for a call on some friend of yours, Luke? It will be most embarrassing for me if he does call. And for him, too, I should think," she added a moment later.

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"He won't consider that; lovers never consider anything," rejoined the more worldly wise one. "And he will call, I feel almost certain."

"Then we go out, or it's my room for me if he calls."

"Then, of course, we must go out." And they did.

They also remained out until very sure that the unwelcome one had departed in case he had called; then started homeward, when, upon turning the corner of two cross streets, and almost beneath a bright electric light, they met the young preacher!

"I am very glad to see you both," he exclaimed cordially, raising his hat, then after the formal responses, added, "I called at your mother's home this evening, Mrs. Miner, and was very sorry to find you both out. I had so much I wished to tell you about my leaving Bristol." He added, with another glance at Ollie, "I must not detain you, ladies, good-night," raised his hat once more, and passed on.

"He's a gentleman at least, not to keep us waiting," declared Luke as they also moved on, "but how he did stare at you, Ollie, every second while he stood there. Poor fellow, he must be awful spoons on you."

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"Yes, so it seems, but why must I be made to feel guilty? I never encouraged him a little bit."

Something less romantic than maidens' fair faces and love-longings met Vance on returning to the Mills and in the shape of a burly, coarse-featured man, with a week's growth of beard and trousers in boots.

"Be ye Mister Harper?" he asked, advancing from beside the big stove in the general store of the Mills, while Vance was opening a letter.

"I am, sir; what can I do for you?" responded Vance, instantly guessing who he was.

"Wal, suthin', mebbe, if ye are a square man. Let's set down 'n' talk it over," and he led the way to the rear and a pile of blankets on a counter. Up beside these he leaped, took a chew of tobacco, crossed his legs and continued, "My name's Ross, 'n' you've ben cuttin' quite a swath through some timber I own. I've ben up 'n' looked it over, 'n' waited here a day to see ye. Now what hev ye to say?"

"Why, I"—hesitated Vance—"I didn't think of any ownership in the matter. Just thought it wild land and went ahead."

"Wal, nothin's wild round here, 'cept bob-cats 'n' sech, 'n' I callate you'll hev to settle."

"Well, I am willing to pay any reasonable sum for damages. How much do you consider they are?"

"Oh, 'bout an even thousand," nonchalantly. "Ye cut a strip 'bout a mile long, 'n' twenty foot wide o' standin' timber." And then Vance thought of what Levi had said.

"I did," he admitted, "and built a good road that you can and will use in the future. It cost me a month's work by five men. Isn't that of some value to you?"

"Not a rap. I'll drive the stream when the time comes," and his heavy lower jaw began to chew viciously.

For a long moment Vance eyed the brutal face before him then sat down on a box with mind made up how to act.

"Well, Mr. Ross," he said firmly, "I will, as I said, pay you reasonable damages, but no more. In the first place, the timber I cut is still there and can be sold where it is for all it is worth, or hauled into the stream and sold for more at the Mills here. All the damages any court would allow is the stumpage, or one dollar a tree. In the next place, if you bring suit, you won't find anything to levy on."

"But ye hev a load o' machinery 'n' two hosses."

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"I have now, but they will be sold and delivered to another man long before your process-server arrives. Now I'll give you a check for just three hundred or you can sue as soon as you please." And the two men eyed each other like two pugilists.

"I'll call it seven hundred," next came from Ross, as Vance arose.

"No, sir. I know the law as well as you do, Mr. Ross, and I'll pay what I say or you can go hunt for a sheriff right now," and Vance started for the door.

Ross followed and began to weaken, of which fact Vance was fully conscious. Outside the door, he said, "Call it five hundred;" by the time the hotel was reached, he said, "Four hundred," and when Vance put his hand on the door-knob, "Oh, wal, I ain't goin' to law fer a few shingles. Give me yer check fer three hundred 'n' let it go at that." And this ended the bargaining.

When Vance reached camp, he found his machinery safe under canvas and new cabin walls all up. It took two weeks more to finish it; then came a long, warm rain which turned the rill, where Peg-leg's tracks were found, into a leaping stream three feet deep. Cutting a road around

the mountain came next, and then Vance began to consider. Steam was the next factor on the road to drilling. That necessitated water near by, so it was plain that the boiler could be located only near the stream. And now came measurements to the place where the two sentinels were found. They had only pipe enough to reach the nearest one on top of the mountain beyond the first gully found. Spring had now arrived and the mountain was bare of snow, and Vance next wrote ordering more pipe. He also wrote two other letters, one that needs no mention ; another to the Professor, asking if he could meet him at Grindstone the first of May and go on to Fort Kent.

“ I have my plans all outlined,” he added, “ and that is to take Levi along with us, go to Fort Kent, swear out a writ, obtain an officer to serve it, and all four of us, well armed, will go to Squash Lake, lie low, surprise Peg-leg, if we can, and then it will be, ‘ Hands up,’ to him. I believe from all I have learned of this outlaw and all Levi has told us that this is the only show to obtain our property. I am also convinced Peg has hidden it near his shack. Of course, this is a warlike proceeding, but legal.”

The next morning Pip was sent on horseback to the Mills and none too soon, for long before he

returned it began to rain. When the boy reached camp, wet through, it was pouring torrents. All the next day it kept on, the lake grew black, snow vanished except on northern slopes; the stream shouted a joyful welcome to freedom once more, and when the sun rose bright the following morn, the lake was a sparkling expanse of rippled water.

Spring had come.

Another week of half-idleness for Vance, impatient to reach Squash Lake, now passed while his men cut paths in the undergrowth over the mountain, and when Sunday dawned once more with a faint shade of green grass on the sloping plat in front, Vance wrote a long letter to Ollie, only a few lines of which need quoting.

"I am," he said, "soon to know whether fortune or 'going broke' awaits me. Our first move is to Squash Lake and a 'Hands-up' play on Peg-leg, if we find him. If not, that ends my forty-thousand-dollar hope. The next will be an assault upon our mountain with steam. And let me assure you the first moment our boiler registers enough, a three-times-three whistle will announce it to the wilderness. How many will sound the glad tidings when we open a pay pocket, I will leave you to count. Meantime, my heart is—well, you can guess where."

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"A trifle bold, that last sentence," he said to himself when reading it over, "but I don't care; let 'er go."

And now as he was soon to face Peg-leg, he opened his trunk, took out a vicious-looking bulldog revolver, pointed it at an imaginary man and yelled, "Hands up!" for practice. Next day, more sentimental, he untied the package of Ollie's letters and read each in order to trace, if he could, an increased interest in him. Not one sign could he discover, until he came to the one received ten days after he last parted from her.

"I have enjoyed two hot cups of coffee each noon at school, out of your more than useful gift," she wrote in this, "and each time I have thought of you. It is these little considerations for one's personal comfort by some one else that brighten our lives."

"By Jove," declared Vance, now folding the letter, "I wish she'd drink coffee every ten minutes, bless her. I feel like the fellow who stepped out of a barber's chair with a relieved sigh and said, 'If I was rich, I'd have my hair cut every day.'"

Early the next morning Vance and Levi launched their canoe and started down-stream for Peg-leg.

CHAPTER XX

A WEEK after Ollie returned from Bath, a touching letter came from the young minister.

“I regret very much and beg your pardon for trying to see you Sunday eve,” he wrote. “I knew from your averted face in church how you felt, and yet so unhappy have I been for two months, I was desperate. But I shall never write to you nor try to see you again. That last glimpse of your face is the final one for me. When mid-summer comes and many times more, I shall go to Bristol to walk over the golf-links, sit under that big maple overlooking the village, and stroll down that shady lane to where the brook crosses it and where we often stood watching its ripples in the moonlight. A pilgrimage to the shrine of my love. I have many times thanked God for the eight months of an illusion in which your face has been a star, and shall do so many times more, for I have never given up all hope until now. And so will your face always wear a halo to me, and your voice always return through my life, sweeter than the call of distant bells at eventide. Good-bye.”

As Ollie read it that morning alone in her little brown schoolhouse, while outside her pupils were

shouting their freedom, she bit her lips while the tears came. All that day a pitying sadness clouded her face, so plainly visible that when her favorite little girl pupil came to kiss her good-bye, she said, "What is the matter, teacher? Has somebody died?"

Just then Ollie would almost have given a year of her life for a letter from Vance, with its optimistic courage, hope, and breath of the wilderness combined. Somehow, lately she had begun to watch for his letters. To have a hope each morn would bring her one, and feel a tinge of disappointment when none came. They had always been wide apart, one or two weeks between each, but lately, or since his last visit, when one week had elapsed with no letter, she began to grow nervous. To imagine something had happened to him. She knew from his descriptions how many dangers he had had to face. The tall trees falling in all directions with him close by. The canoeing down leaping, rock-filled rapids, the rolling of big logs down banks. The fierce wild animals, perhaps waiting to spring upon him, and the deep, deep snow and bitter cold he had dared just to see her in the city. And now his project to pursue and hold up this outlaw; each and all kept recurring to her with cumulative

force. What if he should get maimed, or even mortally injured during his fight against the forces of nature, with no medical aid to save his life? What if he should be carried to his cabin with broken bones to suffer days of agony until a doctor could be brought in? She would not hear of it until long after, perhaps never. Then a greater horror came. What if he were killed and his body laid in a canoe, covered with spruce boughs, and paddled down a long stream and carried around rapids? And now it had been almost two weeks without a letter from him.

That afternoon when she left her schoolhouse she walked slowly down to the wharf, as usual, to meet or await Uncle Terry, with her thoughts far away.

"Would you mind waiting until the stage comes?" she said to him when he had made his boat fast. "I half expect a letter."

"O' course, girlie, no hurry," he responded smilingly, "but ye'd better go into the store 'n' wait. It'll be an hour yit." Then he lit his pipe and reclined upon a long cushion quite content. He was, and always would be willing to do anything his "girlie" wanted.

But no letter came, and Ollie sailed homeward over the long ground swells, watching the bound-

less ocean, while her heart felt like lead. She, too, was learning the sad lesson of love.

That evening while she watched the fitful fire and heard the ocean's sad moaning, two lines of thought kept intruding; one a deep pity for an earnest young man, now trying to conquer an aching void in his life, the other a dull pain in her own heart and fear for another man's life.

"Is it coming to me like this?" she kept thinking. "If anything happens to him, have I got to go on for years trying to conquer my own heart-ache? To feel, as that boy does, that to visit a few scenes in his past life would be a pilgrimage? To suffer on and on, days, weeks, months, years, with one persistent heart-pain? Oh, why is life so filled with unanswered longings? Why so many cross-currents of fate? Why aren't my home and these two kind friends enough for me?" And then, looking at one, now slowly rocking with closed eyes, while he puffed his pipe, came another cross-purpose and feeling of guilt to Ollie. Here he was, looking forward to her company, her songs, her smiles, to cheer him down to the borderland of life, while she—and then came another and deeper pang. Once she had been a homeless, helpless waif of poverty; now she had all the comfort and protection a home and this slowly

rocking man could give. And then, once again came the dread currents of life, tossing her hither and yon. For a long hour more she sat thus silent and sad, then, as usual, Aunt Lissy arose first. And now Uncle Terry, aroused by her good-night, opened his eyes and glanced at Ollie, half facing him from her corner chair.

"What ails ye, girlie?" he questioned tenderly. "Ye hain't ben yerself fer a week or more, not since ye went up to Bath. 'N' to-night ye look like ye'd lost yer last friend. Hez anything gone wrong? Anybody died?"

"Oh, no, nothing, only I was thinking, that was all. And I—I got a letter this morning that hurt me."

"Bad news from the woods, eh?" And Ollie flushed, for this was the first hint of that kind from Uncle Terry.

"Oh, no, no; I haven't heard from Mr. Harper for a long time," she rejoined indifferently. "I guess he's all right."

"Wal, what is it then? Suthin's gone wrong. Ye ain't 'fraid to trust me, be ye?" And then a sudden heart-leap came to Ollie, and she jumped up and into Uncle Terry's lap with both arms around his neck, head, pipe and all, for one instant's hug and kiss on his forehead; then back

to her chair as speedily. "Yes, there has," she answered soberly now, "but not to me." Then she told the story of her visit to Bristol, all that happened there, the letters that followed, her trip to Bath, and ended by reading this young minister's last letter.

"But do ye keer fer him?" questioned Uncle Terry, anxiously.

"No, not one bit, as you mean it. Only I am so sorry for him; he was so earnest and honest about everything."

"But don't ye keer jest a trifle, jest a wee bit?"

"No, no, I tell you"—firmly, "only I feel sorry and guilty in a way for answering his letters. But I never even hinted any encouragement."

"Wal, then cheer up 'n' let yer hair grow"—looking relieved. "He'll git over it fast 'nuff, never fear. Young fellers allus do. It's sorter like mumps 'n' measles to 'em; it hez to come. He may go moonin' 'n' sighin' 'round Bristol jest once, but I doubt it. More'n likely by that time he'll be teachin' 'nother gal to play golf, so cheer up; the worst is yet to come fer him. He's yit to git married 'n' keep a wife 'n' babies on a parson's pay. 'N' that ain't no joke. It's tryin' to make both ends meet when they're 'bout twenty dollars apart that'll wake him up from dreams o'

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halos 'n' moonshine on the brooks. I tell ye, girlie, a good home, 'nuff to eat, 'n' a trifle in the bank is all ye want to think 'bout. Achin' hearts are jest so much waste o' time on the highway o' life, while, ez fer poverty, it takes a skin o' sole-leather, the cunnin' o' a fox, 'n' the go-without o' a man cast away on a raft to stand it." Then came a long pause while a dozen waves thundered on the rocks close by.

"O' course ye'll fall in love some time, girlie," he now resumed. "All folks do. 'N' o' course, ye'll git married, too; all gals orter. But mind this, girlie, think twice; think a hundred times, too, 'fore ye say yes to anybody, 'n' not then 'thout he kin keer fer ye ez ye deserve. While, ez fer achin' hearts, they ain't half ez bad ez the toothache arter a month or two. Fallin' in love is jest like climbin' a wall with a weddin'-ring on top. Arter that, ye're sure to fall off or crawl down to arth agin, anyway. I ain't goin' to give ye any advice jest yit, fer advice is like bogus money, everybody wants to pass it on ye; nobody wants to take it. Then agin, gittin' married is like choosin' one o' two roads, whichever one ye foller ye're bound to wish that ye'd tried t'other one. So go slow, girlie, go slow. Ye're middlin' well off ez it is." Then, after a long pause, while

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he watched the dying fire, he added, "Thar's 'nother thing I might ez well tell ye now ez any time, girlie, jest to chirk ye up. I'm middlin' well fixed; thar's nobody in the world to me but you. I've made my will, 'n' when Lissy 'n' me's gone, you'll never need to teach school no more nor want fer nothin'."

Impulsively, this erstwhile waif of poverty leaped into the lap of him who was almost God to her, clasped his neck and kissed him on face and brow many times, while her eyes filled with tears.

That night the waves sounded to Ollie like the long ago, and faintly recalled the lullaby songs of her mother.

Our moods are our masters from day to day, and what will open our pockets one day will lock them tight the next. And our outlook upon life is even more variable.

With Ollie, Uncle Terry's sage advice and loving assurance lifted her into a tender and optimistic mood, but the next morning, being left at the Cape wharf an hour earlier than usual, she strolled around to pass the time. And now in the light of the bright spring morning the Cape's half-circle of houses served only to remind her of what her life without Uncle Terry would have been. What a grim, sordid, poverty-pinched reminder it all was!

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Bare dooryards, fences, if any, askew, a board or rags serving for an occasional window-panel! And, most pathetic of all, the old hut where she was born, used for storage-room by fishermen, its two rooms filled with piles of seine, tubs of trawl-line, buoys, oars, and all sorts of fishing-gear. Poverty, just a bare existence, bespoke itself all about. The road was full of ruts. No early flowers, like the tulips and jonquils now blooming in her garden, graced any dooryard. Just makeshift, meager living was in evidence, without a hint of beauty or romance. Once more Uncle Terry's observation about poverty returned to her.

"Oh, why must so many be born to live and endure a sordid, half-starved existence without one shred of the world-beautiful entering it?" she thought, now returning to her schoolhouse. Her pupils, now gathering, were ill-clad, and some of them ragged. The boys, mostly barefoot, wore patches on their pants, the girls, with few exceptions, wore faded calico or blue denim pinafores, while, worst of all, a few came with unwashed faces and hands. When noon came, to escape her glum mood, Ollie carried her dinner of dainty sandwiches, cold tongue, cake, a tiny jar of canned berries, and her thermos bottle of hot coffee over to the rocks beyond the lighthouse,

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with the dashing waves for company. There, looking out upon the mist-bordered ocean while she ate, once more the cross-currents of her life returned. With that came a wind-tanned face, firm but tender lips, and forceful eyes. And would he come and demand her "until death parts"? And what could she, what must she answer? Then, as if to accentuate this climax of thought, up from westward of the point came Uncle Terry, his boat now tossing the spray, homeward bound, and waved his broad hat to her as he passed.

One, two, three days dragged their slow way, and then on Friday morning came a letter from Vance. It was, like most of his letters, descriptive only. His meeting with Ross and that man's attempted extortion, the new log cabin, Pip's luck at fishing, how John sat up one night and shot a lynx; but not one word of sentiment from beginning to end. And just now for many reasons, and after these three weeks of waiting, Ollie's heart craved a few tender words. Then as she entered her "temple of learning" once more, it came to her how utterly dependent upon man all women were. First, as patient waiters, until he said, "Will you?" Next "trembling with fear at his frown," as "Sweet Alice" did, and in due time to be always at the beck and call of their "Lord and

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Master." But, as Vance had declared, when the illusion had vanished, all that would be left was a considerate friendship.

Just now, in spite of her two weeks of worry, of Uncle Terry's words, and her repugnance at abject poverty, if Vance had been there, yes, even sitting beside her, watching a moonlit ocean and said, "Will you?" she would have answered, "No," most emphatically.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Vance, with Levi, reached the Mills he found two letters awaiting him, one from Ollie that set him thinking ; the other from the Professor, promising to meet him at Fort Kent two days later.

“I don’t think much of your highwayman’s plan,” the Professor wrote. “First, it’s dangerous, for this Peg may hear or spy us first and the next we know will be the zip of a rifle ball, or a dozen in succession. Or if you do arrest him, he, knowing you haven’t one scintilla of evidence against him, may and can put us all under arrest for assault with intent to kill. How would that strike you? He has, in spite of his predatory ways, some rights in law that even a sheriff must respect. Your only hope is that this outlaw, knowing himself to be one and guilty, will give up and confess rather than be haled to court again. But I will take the chance and join you.”

Of course, Vance had read Ollie’s letter first, but now on second perusal its undertone seemed disquieting.

“I have been expecting your letter for over a week now,” she wrote, “because you usually write

each week and it has been almost three since we heard from you. Of course, we all imagined something had happened—naturally—and pardon me, but I think you have been neglectful. If we have friends, we have them, and there is always a dividing line between friends and mere acquaintances, or should be. We were all glad to hear you were safe and everything going on as usual. I have been blue and out of sorts for some time over matters beyond my control, but now that spring is here, my flowers peeping out, life seems more cheerful. Maybe I need a spring tonic. Hope that wild man of the woods won't shoot first."

"Now, why the 'we' instead of the 'I' as usual?" muttered Vance, "and what does she mean by those 'matters beyond my control'? Is that minister still after her? Maybe he got so daffy he came to see her. Of all the chilly letters you have written me, Miss Iceberg, this one is the limit. It has a fringe of icicles all around it." Once more the green-eyed demon was glaring at Vance.

He went on to Fort Kent, however, with Levi and that night, so hurt was he, he wrote Ollie :

"Your letter received yesterday, and let me assure you it pained me more than I care to admit. I have written you every time I could send a letter out, and sometimes sent a guide out for that

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purpose only. I have sometimes done so in hope to receive a letter from you, only to meet disappointment. Of course, friends are friends, and should so consider one another. I had hoped from one tiny shred of feeling in a previous letter that you felt me to be just a little more than a friend, but I am sure now I guessed wrong. We shall leave here to-morrow, fully armed to assault that thief, Peg-leg, in his lair."

When Ollie read this letter she shed copious tears, and was more disconsolate than ever. Then came the uplift, and, "I don't care if my letter was cold! I am no 'Sweet Alice' to tremble for him."

When the Professor arrived, Vance had obtained a writ to "arrest one Joseph Bonette, who did unlawfully, etc., etc.," secured a deputy-sheriff to serve it, hired two canoes, a tent, bought provisions and cooking-utensils, and the next morning started up the twenty miles of stream to Squash Lake.

It was almost sunset ere they reached it, then keeping close to the shore paddled on until, rounding a bend, Levi caught sight of a low slate cabin. "Nobody to hum, I callate," he whispered, shoving the prow of his canoe into the bushes. "No smoke risin', anyhow, 'n' it's time." Both canoes were next drawn out into the bushes, and

the four men, each with pistol in hand, began their stealthy crawl, step by step through the tangled undergrowth, Levi leading. Soon they were above the cabin, seeing only its roof. Crouching low and crawling like so many cats, first Levi, then Vance, then Officer Hincks, peeped over the jagged slate bank.

But no sign or sound of aught human came to the watching, listening ones.

This cabin, a rude contrivance, tent-shaped, with four logs for a base, upright posts and cross-bar or ridge-pole, was covered with thin slabs of slate with bark outside. A canoe lay bottom-up back of it. The tiny ripples of the lake plashed faintly upon the shale beach in front. The setting sun flashed a red glow from the farther shore, now placid and like a mirror. Beyond and to the left the lake curved around a low swampy point, midway of which a tall whitened stump rose like a wildwood monument. Upon the top of this, as if to accentuate the utter solitude of the swamp-bordered lake, sat a crow in silent observation.

After a long look all around, a five minutes of listening, Levi, followed by the rest, crept cautiously down and around to the front of this unique shack. Here a low slate door lashed to small poles was wide open and a musty, malodor-

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ous smell emanated. Peering in, all saw a little camp-stove, red with rust, a slab-table back of it, upon which stood a quart bottle, with tinware, scraps of food, and coffee-pot around it. A rifle lay crosswise a narrow bed made of saplings with a blanket half hiding its interior, filled with moss and grass, while the cabin's floor of slate slabs was carpeted with reeds and moss. A deer's hide and a dozen muskrat pelts also hung from the ridge-pole.

"Wal," ejaculated Levi, the first to speak, "Peg ain't here, that's sartin, 'n' he hain't ben here all winter, either, by the looks o' that stove." Then entering boldly, he raised and sniffed at the half-filled bottle. "Split, by gosh," he added, passing the bottle to Vance, "'n' now I know suthin' must 'a' happened to Peg. He'd never leave a half-full bottle behind him.

"I think I kin line it out now," he continued, looking around the tiny room. "The cuss come here right arter he got out o' jail with pack, rifle, split, 'n' all, or mebbe he had hid the rifle here. The fust thing he did war to eat, then fill up on split; a pint 'ud make even him roarin' drunk, 'n' then I callate he must 'a' gone out onto the lake or back into the woods fer suthin', laid down drunk, 'n' froze to death 'fore mornin'. Thar's his snow-

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shoes," he continued, stooping and drawing them from back of the bed, "'n' to-morrer we'll find his carcass up back, or it's on the bottom o' the lake." And so it appeared to the rest. But the sun was now below the horizon, so all hastened back to their canoes and by dark had the tent up beside Peg's shack, and supper cooking.

"It's a wild, lonely spot," Vance observed later, when all were reclining upon blankets around their cheery camp-fire, "and think of even a savage abiding here, much less a civilized human!"

"I wouldn't call Peg civilized," rejoined Levi, lighting his pipe anew with a twig from the fire, "jest a cross 'tween Injun 'n' pirate." Now, as if to add romance to this narrow, crescent-shaped, swamp-enclosed lake, from far eastward a full moon peeped over a mountain-top. Also, to herald it, from just across came the long vibrant "yaool" of a lynx. A loon's "hallooo" answered from beyond the swampy point, and then came another "yaool" just below and to the left of the camp.

"We've neighbors, anyhow," asserted the Professor, glancing furtively up the bank, "but I don't want any calls from them."

"No danger," rejoined the wood-wise Hincks.

"No night-prowlers ever come near a fire. In fact, if they see you first in daylight you won't see them. I've hunted, fished, camped, and slept under canoes in these woods for years and never saw but one bob-cat and he was up a tree."

"Kill him?" questioned Vance.

"Yes, I was lucky to have my rifle, and brought him down with one ball. It took three more to quiet him, however. There is a good deal of needless fear of our wild animals," he continued. "Outside of the Rocky-Mountain lions and grizzlies, we have none that will attack man on sight. Formerly in this State, we had a few panthers, 'Injun devils,' they used to call them, that would spring upon a man if the chance came. But they were long ago exterminated. Now our lucivees, or lynx as most call them, and the smaller bobcats, also our black bears will all flee at sight of man unless cornered. Then they will fight."

But the time, place, and their weird surroundings were not conducive to talk, and so silence fell upon the four, who watched the moon's silvered path or the crackling fire and smoked on until Vance broke the stillness. "The question is, Levi," he said, turning to his guide, "where shall we look for our tourmalines?"

"Wal, I've ben tryin' to figger that out my-

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self. I callate Peg 'ud nat'rally want 'em clus to him, feelin' mebbe you might show up, or he'd want to make a quick gitaway. 'N' so it's clus about here we'd best look fust. He's dead, I'm sartin. He couldn't leave here all winter 'thout snow-shoes, 'n' here they are. That half-bottle o' split p'ints the same way. Peg 'ud never leave licker behind him. So I callate we'd best rip up the floor o' the shack fust, next hunt fer hidin'-places 'long the bank o' slate, or if thar's rocks up back, 'mongst them."

At daybreak—only four o'clock at that time of year—fog lay upon the lake, and Vance, awake early, followed Levi out of the tent. He looked around curiously at the unique hut close by. Peering once more into its uninviting interior he saw more evidences of Peg's outcast life here. A strip of jerked venison hung from a nail, and another grey with mould lay on the floor in one corner. Under the table were pieces of ham-rind and other refuse that made him turn away in disgust.

"His name ought to be pig instead of Peg," declared Vance, joining in a search for fire-wood. "Why not chop up some of the shack's wood-stuff?" Vance next suggested, and acting on this suggestion the cabin's ridge-pole, supports, back covering and rude furnishings were reduced to

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fuel. "You can have the rifle, Levi," Vance next declared, bringing it out, also a handsome leather belt full of cartridges. "He probably stole this belt, anyhow," then tossed both into one canoe.

After breakfast the search began, and Vance felt a dull dread at the almost hopelessness of it all. The cabin floor was first torn up and pitched out, but beneath it only hard shale was found. The canoe, an old patched one with a jagged slit in its bottom, was overturned, but there was no sign of a hole beneath it. Then began a search along the out-jutting slate bank above and up and down the lake shore. There were perhaps forty rods of this, grey, white, and yellow streaked, jagged outcropping; and for two hours the four men hunted its entire length many times over. They poked sticks into holes and crevices, shook or pulled over loose slabs of slate, peered into cracks and crannies, but all without reward, or the finding of one encouraging sign. Vance and the Professor then sat down to rest while Levi and Hincks climbed the bank to hunt for signs among the tangled scrub-spruce alongside the lake and beyond into the swamp where they had first landed.

"I guess it's a failure," Vance sighed, lighting his pipe for consolation. "That Peg pig never hid his loot here, I am satisfied."

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"I doubt he did, for fear some fall hunting-party might ransack his hut while he was away," rejoined the Professor, also sighing. "Let me see, it was in September the deed was done and Peg knew the next two months would be the hunting season. No, it's hopeless to look here. My theory is he hid them far away, a half-mile, maybe, in the swamp and in some hollow stump, perhaps. Or else he went back and found some tangle of rocks to hide them in," and the little man also lit his pipe, and for a long ten minutes the two surveyed the rippled lake and swamp for miles around. And then Vance spoke again.

"Do you know, Pro, we are at about the end of our capital?" he said gloomily. "I went over my little account-book at Fort Kent and we have only about two hundred left. Besides we owe three-fifty for machinery due next week, and June first we shall owe our men a month's pay. Of course we still have our savings bank funds in reserve, but I hate to touch them," and Vance sighed once more. "Then again," he continued after another long pause, "I must have an expert miner to lead the work. I am not familiar with that; our men are not. I have planned to let Jean go but we must have a mine-worker in his place. Can't you go and see this Ross Bickford

on your way home and get him to send us a man? He must know of one who will answer."

"I'll do it," returned the Professor with more buoyancy, "while as for money, I'll put two thousand to our credit on my return. You have furnished all the capital so far. I also feel positive that as soon as you begin drilling you will find tourmalines."

"I hope to Heaven we shall, or it's me for a job, with Sherman perhaps, or a hunt for some kind of work," and then Vance flew in thought to Uncle Terry's home and his hopes that centered there. "Oh, well," he added with still another sigh, "we can't back out now. It's go on until the last dollar in our locker is used."

When noon came, Levi and Hincks returned and the only sign they reported was the finding of an empty cartridge-box and two shells in a rocky fissure, beside which lay a few slabs of slate. "I bet Peg hid his gun thar when he went out early last fall," Levi next announced. "'N' thar's a sorter dingle up back o' this spot we didn't hev time to search 'fore dinner. We'll do it this arternoon."

When they had departed after dinner Vance lit his pipe and sat down, reclining upon the sloping shale shore and looked all around it slowly and

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carefully. "Pro," he then said, "just imagine yourself to be Peg-leg with his make-up, an ignorant brute hating and fearing all human kind, and sitting right here considering where best to hide valuable loot. Think it all over and tell me where you would go to do it. Remember, also, it was just at the opening of the hunting season when he knew sportsmen might visit this lake while he was away, even the party he robbed two years before. Put yourself in Peg's place and try to solve the problem. I am trying to do so."

And then the Professor reclined upon the sloping shale, as Vance had done, to scan the lake and think. For a quarter-hour they considered their hard problem in this way, scanning the lake shore just across, then up and down its entire length, and far away over the wide bordering swamp. "I give it up," admitted the Professor first. "I can't make myself think or feel like this outlaw."

"Nor I," coincided Vance, "only this: his first thought would be to select some spot no sportsman would be apt to visit." Then once again the two looked at the opposite shore for ten minutes more in silence. Then Vance happened to notice a crow fly up from midway the swampy point, perch upon the tall stump and utter a "caw caw."

Soon another arose, lit just below this one, cawed twice, after which both flew away.

The eyes of Vance and the Professor met.

"Well?" questioned Vance, smiling.

"It might be there," answered the Professor.

As if by mutual consent and without a word more, Vance arose, shoved a canoe into the lake, the Professor stepped in, and away they paddled eagerly to midway the swamp point. Here Vance pushed the canoe well up into the bushes rising above the water, the Professor stepped out, Vance gave the light craft another shove; and then the two, eager yet silent, Vance leading, stepped from bog to bog up through thick alders to where the huge stump stood upon a two-rod oval of scrub-covered upland. With a beating heart, Vance took ten steps more and peered into a gaping hole, perhaps two feet wide and four feet high in the base of the whitened stump. There, half hidden under bits of rotten wood and earth, he saw a human skull grinning up at him!

One instant Vance, horrified, stared down at the grewsome object, the next, his eyes caught the glint of a bright green tourmaline flashing in the sunlight!

Their fortune was found!

As the Professor and Vance, side by side,

speechless, stared down at their surprising discovery, a half-dozen more gems added their green sparkle to the gleam of white teeth, and realizing what they had found, four hands clasped and the two men began to dance and shout their hilarious joy in spite of the presence of the ghastly skull.

"It's Peg's," shouted Vance, next finding a stick to pry it up and out with, then kicking it aside. Close by and half hidden under bushes he saw the bones of a skeleton, well gnawed and white in the sunlight, and like a warning finger, the round peg stump of this thief pointing upward.

But neither skull, bones, nor any thought of this outlaw's end came to these two joyous men, only to kneel and claw among the mould and bark, and fill their hats with sparkling gems. While so doing, they came upon the gnawed and torn pouch that had once held their small fortune. For two hours now, as once before Vance had done, so did they both dig deep into that filthy mould until hats and pockets were filled with soiled but glittering gems. Not yet, however, did they stop, but after a few moments' rest once again pawed over that mound of mould and rotten bark.

"Guess we've got 'em all," Vance declared, squatting upon hard soil.

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“ Guess so, too,” admitted the little man, likewise squatting. And then as a finale to this tense excitement, the two filled and lit their pipes. How long they thus sat smoking and discussing their marvelous rediscovery, neither knew nor cared, and not until the lowering sun warned them of time did they think of aught else. Before leaving, the Professor, unused to wildwood life and curious about this monster stump, peered up into its cavernous interior, to see two big, yellow, horrible eyes glaring down at him !

CHAPTER XXII

A SOBER second thought came to Vance the next morning, which was to return to the hollow stump and bury the bones of Peg-leg. Of course all four, pistol in hand, crept to it stealthily. Levi looked carefully within, but as no yellow eyes glared at him, their work was soon done and that night they slept at Fort Kent once more.

"I think we would better keep still about our luck," Vance cautioned the Professor as they trundled away by train again. "Of course Sheriff Hincks will tell the story, and I am willing. I rather want that highwayman, Ross, to hear it, but nobody in the city, especially Sherman. Tell Myra, of course, but mention to her how I feel. And now you must turn those gems into money as fast as possible. I think most of them will have to be sent to New York to find a buyer. See Bickford on your way back, for we must have an expert miner. I know as much about stoping, cross-cutting, and tunneling as a ten-year-old boy."

When Grindstone was reached late that afternoon, the two shook hands almost as hilariously as they had beside that monster stump, for all need of worry about money was now gone. "My love to Myra," Vance said, "and write me just as soon as you find how much our tourmalines are worth. And why can't you and Myra come up to the camp for an outing this month? You will soon be off duty at college and it will do you both good. Bring your niece, too; they can have the old cabin to sleep in while you and I will use a tent. Do it, old friend."

The Professor promised.

At Grindstone Vance hired a team to carry himself and Levi that night to the Mills, and as they entered a scattered forest where glints of silvery light cast shadows across the roadway, he wondered if Ollie were watching the moon's glittering path across the broad ocean just then. With that thought came a shade of regret that he had written such a chilly response to her letter. "It's no way to win her," he said to himself. "That 'we' might have been pride. She has it a-plenty. And 'other matters'—well, she said she had declined to write that boy parson again and she will keep her promise. Especially as she made it unasked." Then Vance began to consider once

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more why she had brought up the matter at all. Was it a hint that she was heart-free, or one that she meant never to marry? That had been a puzzle to him now for weeks, yet never solved. Once again Vance tried to do so, and feel how monotonous and dull a life she led, so utterly alone and away from all congenial companions. Next came the pathetic admission in her last letter that her budding flowers would soon cheer her a little.

"Poor little lonesome," Vance next thought, "to be so desolate that a few flowers will cheer you up." And Vance recalled the story of a life-prisoner into whose cell a toad had hopped. How that hopeless man had found companionship in the creature. How for weeks and months he fed it crumbs from his food, and flies, talked to it, stroked it, and how when a hard-hearted sentry came to kick the toad out, the man had begged on his knees for his only companion, and afterwards lost his reason.

"She isn't down to that state of mind, thank God," Vance next thought, "but after all she is almost as much alone. I will write her as nice and tender a letter as I dare in the morning."

When that came, he was up early, in fact before the Mills' big store was open, and he waited im-

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patiently until it was, in hope of a letter from Ollie. But none awaited him. He wrote his letter, however, a repentant and far longer one than ever before, and the first one with more than a hint of tenderness in it. Then he said in a post-script: "We have bearded the tiger, alias Peg-leg, in his lair, but found only his bones, which we buried. We also found our stolen gems."

Three days later, more buoyant than ever before in his life, Vance and his men had the boiler properly placed at the foot of the first gully near the brook, small pipes laid over the mountain to the big sentinel, and drills in position. By the middle of the afternoon a fire was started in the boiler and, "just for luck," as Vance said to his men, a three-times-three whistle echoed across the lake.

The long-delayed and hard-reached time to assault that gullied mountain had arrived.

Some one else, very welcome, also arrived that night in the person of Ross L. Bickford with guide, canoe, and fishing outfit.

"Yes, your partner, Professor Moss, called on me," he admitted after the usual greetings, "and a very able man in his line of work he is, too. I shall send you an assistant later, but thought I'd run up, look your mountain over, and fish a few

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days." That evening his guest loaned Vance a book that gave the origin and value of tourmalines, where found, how mined, and all lesser details that kept him deeply interested for hours.

After breakfast Vance led the way up to the drills and big "sentinel," and then the expert grew enthusiastic. "You have here," he said after a look around, "the best position for work and most promising signs I ever saw. First, the mountain slopes away favorably to begin stoping. The overlapping lapidolite appears of but few feet in thickness, and below that comes albite, in which all pockets of sand and gravel containing tourmalines are found. In this, the nearness of a pocket is always defined by a yellowish green tinge to the darker albite. When that appears, go slow, use small blasts, it is a soft rock, and later use driven wedges instead of dynamite. You might unknowingly drill into a fat pocket and blow its contents far and wide. Such pockets are rare, however ; most contain from a few to fifty or more gems, just as blow-holes in pig-iron are always small. These pockets were originally blow-holes in albite confined by the harder lapidolite. Now set your drills here," indicating where, "and drill holes of from two to four feet in depth, and usually three feet apart. The drill-handler

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can tell when softer rock is reached, then stop short, for it's albite." And thus directed, a fire in the boiler was started and soon the "chiss-hiss" and "rat-tat" of steam-drills began.

The assault upon this mountain, upheaved when the world was new, was now on.

By the middle of the forenoon one row of holes was drilled, cartridges inserted, copper wires twisted together, two long wires attached, then Vance, dry battery in hand and back of a rock, connected that fearful force to send tons of rock down the mountain-side with a roar.

How that booming blast echoed from mountain to hillside across the lake, and how it rumbled through the silent wilderness like onrolling thunder!

Another blast was made ready by noon, and as if in honor of Bickford's arrival, the hoped for yellow-green shade was laid bare. Next came drilled holes and wedges and just as the sun reached the horizon a pocket two feet wide was opened, stuffed full of green gems!

Vance led the party in cheering, while Pip, tending boiler below, joined one long whistle to the shouting.

"I'd like to own this mountain," Bickford said to Vance as the two led the way to camp

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once more, "for from my observations of all these gullies to-day, their easy access and their exact similarity of outcropping strata, all you have to do is drill and blast your way to a fortune within six months. And then you have only just begun work. If this mountain were mine, a million dollars wouldn't buy it."

In gratitude to his visitor, Vance accompanied him in a trolling tour of the lake next day and netted the fish for him. Ross Bickford remained two days longer, fly-casting or trolling when he chose, or watching the drilling operation. Three smaller pockets were opened in this time, and fully two quarts of gems secured. Vance gave him the finest one in the lot, "for a keepsake, sir." He also wrote full particulars to the Professor under a big letter caption of "*We Win*," and then settled down to steady work.

But the excitement of even fortune-finding palls a little in time, and so after the new expert sent by Bickford arrived and took charge, Vance became a mere onlooker. And thus it came to pass that a week later he shouldered his rifle one afternoon for a cruise eastward and a wide circuit around the mountain and through the tall timber enclosing it. He kept on for a half-mile, bearing to the left, then came to a low scrub-covered ridge

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of rocks, perhaps thirty feet high and trending northeast from the mountain. He followed this out along its base quite a distance, came upon a few mother partridges with their usual fluttering tactics, crossed the ridge, and turned back toward the mountain again. He followed on a hundred rods or more then came upon a queer V-shaped opening in the ridge, now higher than it had been. This unique, wide-open gap sloped sharply upward, its bottom a tangle of moss-coated stones of all shapes and sizes ; while a thicket of scrub-spruce overhung its top, partially darkening it.

"Nice place for a bear," Vance thought, peering up its interior. And just then came a muttered roll of thunder to eastward and a rim of black cloud above the tree-tops. "Guess I would better start for camp," Vance said. "Showers rise quickly here. I'll take a peek in first, then hike for home."

He leaned his rifle against a tree, stepped lightly up over the moss-coated stones, then halted and almost gasped, for there, protruding from a depression in one wall, was another "sentinel." A faint flash of distant lightning made it blink one instant like the lone eye of a hidden monster. For one moment Vance stared at this dull, green, ominous eye, then another rumble came and he turned

to leave. Just then one foot slipped on a moss-coated stone, he leaped to save himself a fall, pitched forward, jammed one arm under a stone and gave a cry of pain. Sitting up, he found his right hand was useless. He tried to stand now when another throb of pain from his ankle followed, causing him to drop like a falling tree, and he rolled over the sloping stones to the level soil below.

"O Lord," he groaned, sitting up and feeling of his broken arm, "I am crippled for keeps," then crawled to the tree where his rifle stood. One moment he looked upward to see a black cloud fast overspreading the sky, the next came another brighter flash and the sound of rolling thunder. An instinctive dread next turned his eyes to that queer split in the ridge, and as the flashes came faster, so did that evil eye blink in unison. With a new uncanny fear creeping over him, Vance tried to calm himself and think. And well might he fear ; for here he was, almost helpless, a storm rising, sunset but an hour away, and he a mile from camp !

His first calm thought was to fire his rifle and alarm the camp ; the next that none would hear it above the roaring wind, and following that the thought that he must save his few shots until a

searching-party came out to return their signals and thus save his life. Now came another dreadful fear that this was the third and last stroke of ill fortune, perhaps to cost him his life. With this fear came Ollie's face and his promise to her to meet and fight a third blow with heroism.

"By Jove, I will," he said, gritting his teeth. "I'll hop to camp on one foot if I must." Then with his hunting-knife he slashed strips of cloth from his coat, tied them and made a sling for his broken arm. As if to deal a parting blow, down fell a rattle of rain and hail just then, cold, cutting, and merciless, while above all came the roar of a tornado blast and crash of thunder. To escape it was impossible. He could only sit beside that bending, creaking tree and take the pelting as best he might. The storm soon passed, but a black pall of cloud quite hid the sky. And then Vance arose, stood upon one foot with left hand against the tree and looked around to make sure of his bearings. To the right, he could barely see the mountain-top, in front, the scrub-covered ridge, and to the left, a deep, dense forest. And now sure of the cabin's direction, he began an almost hopeless attempt to reach it by using his rifle for a staff and hopping on one foot as best he could.

He reached and crawled over the ridge, then

continued his slow, staggering progress, six inches or a foot at a step. The undergrowth impeded him, and when he reached rocks, he knelt on one knee and dragged himself over them, then rose once more and took a few short hops. His left knee thus used began to grow bruised and sore. His sprained ankle, wrenched many times in his crawling progress, pained him still more. His broken arm, swaying and often bumped, added keener pain, so much that he could scarce keep from groaning. With grim determination and oft gritting his teeth, he still kept on, however, for it was his only hope of escape from his awful plight.

He kept thinking how soon his men would miss him and what they would do then. That they would start out upon a search for him at once he felt positive, and yet he was sure that none of them knew where he had gone, or in what direction. A faint hope came to him that the shower might have driven them to camp, and that they would thus miss him a little sooner. He knew, also, that both Levi and John were keen woodsmen; they might try following his trail, or make a woodsman's deduction of what direction he had taken. He knew, like all wood-wise men, that a single shot, repeated at intervals, would be

their first call to him, and two in quick succession must be the recognized answer.

He thankfully recalled how he had thought to save his own shells. "But how many shells have I?" came next, then he squatted upon a rock, opened his rifle magazine, and counted them. Only four remained, and he had brought no extra ones.

A slim chance to answer calls a mile away and to summon his rescuers to him.

The dim forest was growing darker. Night with thick clouds and inky blackness was drawing nearer. He must move on while even twilight lasted, so once more he began his slow hop-step progress. A faintness from the long agony of pain began to assail him. He grew dizzy from it. The tree-trunks began to sway and move back and forth. The darkness increased; he could no longer see where to step, but still feeling his way with the tip of his rifle, he made a few hops. And then came his last one as his foot slipped and he pitched forward to fall at the foot of a big spruce.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned, while the earth seemed to rise up as if to roll him off into space, "is this the end?" Then he lost all consciousness.

How long this faintness lasted he never knew,

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only that when he became conscious once more total darkness hid even the tree-trunk beside him. It might have been five minutes, it might have been an hour.

And then, oh blessed sound, he heard one rifle shot, then another and finally a third! He returned two shots in quick succession. Three more answered from far away, and then Vance waited, for only one more answer from him was possible. One, two, five, maybe ten minutes, he lay there, rifle beside him, then two more shots called through the darkness. They seemed a trifle nearer this time, and he raised his rifle and fired his last two in response, then lost consciousness once more.

He had assaulted that mountain with steam, with drills, with dynamite, to blast and tear its primeval rock asunder. To open its secrets to the light of day, to enter its once gas-filled pockets, to desecrate its birthmarks left there when the world was young, and all to gratify human greed. And the mystic genii, the fabled owners and occupants of all Nature's domain, had now turned upon him, smitten him with broken bones, with pelting hail, with the blackness of night, to leave him dying, like a broken reed behind a tornado.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT is a serious matter to be caught in a dense wilderness on a starlit night, but when the stars are hidden by black clouds one might as well be blind. None knew this better than Levi and his men, and when Vance failed to appear at early twilight they made ready to go in search of him. Flares, consisting of long strips of lightwood wrapped in birch bark, were prepared, guns loaded, and without waiting for supper, even, the three men with Pip and his dog, Bob, started just as darkness hid the tree-trunks.

"Him go down east side mountain last I see," John volunteered, as they started.

"We'll keep to east'rd on't, then," Levi directed, "'n' 'bout twenty rods apart, 'n' pass a hello 'long every now 'n' then." And so with torches lit, much resembling witch-lights blinking among the thick spruce-trees, the search began with John at the right of the line, Pip and Douglas midway, and Levi at left, near the mountain. But progress through a dense wilderness in total darkness must be very slow. 'Flares at best give only a fitful

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light, oft dying down. Undergrowth impedes, fallen trees block the way, a jumble of rocks must be crawled over, and thus a full half-hour was taken to go a few hundred rods. Guns were fired at ten-minute intervals, but no response came, and then after almost an hour of slow progress, Levi halted to get his bearings.

"I dunno what it means," he said with growing fear. "Here we are, 'bout east side o' the mountain, 'most a mile from camp, 'n' not a peep. He can't be this side, that's sartin. Suthin' must 'a' happened," then he lit a fresh flare and moved on. Soon he came to the low ridge. He recognized it, and knew it ran eastward a mile to end at a swamp morass, so he halloed an order for the rest to turn and meet him when this "hog-back," so called, was reached.

"Him no this side," John declared, coming up to Levi, then the two looked at one another with alarm. Another pertinent fact also faced them: their flares were nearly all used up!

"We've got to go back or stay here all night," Levi asserted, then called to Douglas and the boy to come up to them. But the dog, following close to Pip, suddenly began to bark, then ran up the ridge, to halt and bark sharply in quick succession on top of it.

"Him found something," John said, hastening to where the dog had first barked. "Here track, too," he added, stooping as Levi came up; then both saw where a bit of moss had been lately scraped away from a sloping rock. Both, stooping to watch for another sign, crept up the ridge with the boy following.

"Go fetch, Bob; go fetch," he ordered, patting his dog, that again barked sharply into the inky darkness beyond, then led the searchers down the further side of the ridge, ran a few rods along its base to halt, bark once more, and ascend it again. John, hurrying to the now excited dog, saw where moss had been scraped from several rocks, in fact a trail of them up the ridge. "He crossed it twice," Levi next asserted, coming up to John, "so he must be between us 'n' camp. It's back fer us, I callate, 'n' keepin' together so ez to save flares. We hain't but 'bout a dozen left," he added, counting what the rest carried, then ordered all but his own extinguished. And just then the dog began barking upward in sharp succession at the base of a big spruce, two rods away. "He's ben here," Levi said, hastening to the tree and pointing to where the carpet of needles had been trodden and disturbed by human feet. Then all joined him to look at that first real sign of the lost man.

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A bit of cloth next caught the sharp eyes of John. "He tore it from coat," he announced, holding it close to the light. And then the two woodsmen looked into one another's eyes with keen concern, for this was an ominous sign.

"Suthin' happened to him," declared Levi, examining the telltale bit of cloth, "'n' he tore this from the linin' o' his coat. I know it, fer 'twar thick grey satin, 'n' so's this."

The dog now began to grow more excited, first sniffing at the tracks beside the tree, then to bark upward at it again and next to follow the trail away to the ridge once more. "Go find; go find," Pip directed, and all trailed after that keen-nosed dog, half believing he would find the missing man. Before crossing the ridge, Levi fired one more signal shot and then, to the joy of all, came two answers in quick response. They quite upset Levi's calculations, however, for to the best of his hearing they came from the mountain-top.

"Which way?" he then queried of John as both watched each other's faces. But John only shook his head. For ten minutes those puzzled men looked at one another, then at the dog, now barking and running back and forth between them and the ridge, and then John silently led the way up to its top. "Hark," he next said to Levi, then

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raised his gun and fired it into the inky darkness. Two reports answered in quick response and this time from between them and the camp. "We find him soon, now," asserted John hopefully, and once more the searchers followed him, now carrying the only light. Shot after shot was also fired but no more answers came. Only an occasional bark from the dog, that with his confident master kept close to John. For a quarter-mile the four pushed slowly on in Indian file, then suddenly the dog halted, sniffed to right and left, then leaped away through the undergrowth to stop and bark once more. Then hurrying to him, John saw the dog licking the face of the unconscious Vance.

That helpless man was saved !

John knelt, felt for Vance's heart, and shouted, "He's alive !" in joyful tone, then scraped handfuls of damp moss from rocks and began rubbing the prostrate man's face and neck with them.

A gasped, "Hello, where am I ?" soon answered, and as John lifted his head tenderly an, "Oh, God, my arm !" was added.

Only a few words of explanation followed, then John, handing his torch to Levi, drew the helpless man on his back, Douglas grasped his legs, Levi led the way to camp with the dog, the most ex-

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cited one of all, dancing around him. So ended a wilderness episode not at all uncommon.

Quick, if rude, camp surgery came soon after camp was reached and a fire and lights lit; for Vance was then undressed and laid in his bed. John and Levi grasped his arm above and below the fracture, and while Vance ground his teeth from intense pain, soon had the bones in place and arm bound to a strip of board. Then John, wisest woodsman of them all, lit a flare and vanished from the cabin.

Soon, also, Levi had hot cloths bound around that black, swollen ankle, and then poor Vance, relieved of some pain, sat up.

"Well, old friend Levi, God bless you," he said, trying to grin in spite of pain. "And all of you, too, for saving my life," he added, looking at the rest. "But where's John?"

"Oh, he'll be back soon," returned Levi, smiling, "and now will ye eat?"

"Will I eat?" almost shouted Vance. "Will a duck swim?"

By this time a pan of frying ham, and another of trout were sputtering on the fire, and when John returned, bringing one big bunch of broad green leaves and another of small sprigs of red buds and blossoms, Vance was sitting upright in bed with a

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chair at his back, sipping hot coffee and devouring trout like a famished man. All the rest of those faithful woodsmen were occupied in the same manner.

Well might they be, for it was two o'clock in the morning !

A thick pad of the broad leaves John had brought was next wilted in hot water, bound close around Vance's swollen ankle, and soon, despite his pain, a thrice-blessed sleep came to him.

But the ever-faithful Levi watched and dozed beside him on a blanket until morning.

CHAPTER XXIV

WITH the first dawn of light Vance awoke after two hours of pain-disturbed sleep. He first felt of his aching arm and swollen hand bound to a strip of board. Next of his throbbing ankle and black-and-purple foot. The previous night's experience next returned, and then Vance, raising himself upon one elbow, saw Levi softly snoring on a blanket close by. He would not waken that exhausted man, so lay back to feel that steady throbbing pain in arm and ankle once more. As if to cheer him a little, the morning chorus of birds came from all around outside. How sweet that warbling, chirping, caroling concert now was to that suffering man! A red squirrel's "churr-chut-chut" came next. One, two, three more joined in answer. A loon's "hallooo" quavered down the lake. The "quack-quack" of a pair of ducks followed. The wilderness was once more wakening to welcome the dawn. The cabin grew brighter; a ray of sunlight peeped in through the one

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small window above Vance and outlined a red spot on the log wall twenty feet away. But still Levi slept on, and Vance lay back to hear the birds sing.

As if to try the mind-cure for pain, he leaped in thought to a sea-girt island far away. He saw the waves beating against its rock-ribbed seaward side. Saw the green rock-weed sway in the surf. Saw the red-roofed cottage just back, with its wide piazza on three sides, its flower-garden to southward, its broader one for vegetables to the rear, with Ollie there bending low and picking peas or green beans. Saw the family later at table, Uncle Terry garbed as usual in brown shirt, vest, trousers, and carpet-slippers ; Aunt Lissy in calico with white cap covering her scanty grey hair, and Ollie also in calico, smiling while she poured coffee and served the old folk. Saw her later in grey dress and sailor hat follow Uncle Terry over the winding path down the weedy stairs, then leap over the inrolling swells in Uncle Terry's motor-boat to the harbor wharf. He saw her still later when the evening lamp was lit and Uncle Terry rocked and smoked in calm content. Saw *her* at the piano while dimpled fingers strayed up and down the white keys, as she sang :

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“ When the rainy shower-clouds gather
Over all the starry spheres ;
And the melancholy darkness
Gently weeps in rainy tears,”

even as he had heard her sing it there before.

As he returned to his own throbbing pain, Vance wondered if once during that bright June day her thoughts had been of him. If even one little wonder as to where he was or what doing had come to her. Or (perish the thought!) had her mind strayed only to that young clergyman's poetic face, while he preached his very soul out to an unresponsive audience? And what would she say, feel, or think when she read the scrawled missive he meant to send her that day?

Vance began to consider his own wretched plight from all sides now. He knew it would be two weeks before he could step on his sprained ankle, and fully six before his arm would be of any use. And what of his plans to entertain the Professor, Myra, and their niece soon to arrive? The drilling could go on, he would be fed and cared for, but to lie here day after day, a helpless cripple, with no books to read and unable to write, was terrible. True, he might hobble out to the porch and sit there alone. He might even be helped to a canoe by Levi and paddled around

the lake for a more beneficial change. With the throbbing pain in his arm now increasing, he began to fear it might need to be reset or he lose its use for all time. Surely a doctor must be brought from the Mills and as soon as possible. Also liniments, medicines, sleeping-powders, and many things a sick one needs. Besides that, since ladies were soon to arrive, table-linen, silverware, and better dishes must be brought in also.

"John and Pip must go out this very morning," Vance said aloud, forgetting the sleeping Levi and causing that prostrate man to sit up.

"Wal, how be ye?" he queried, rising and feeling of his patient's pulse. "No fever yit," he continued, smiling, "but ye had an awful spell last night, 'n' a clus call, too."

"But I was saved, thanks to you, Levi, and the rest," Vance responded, feelingly.

"Wal, no, 'twar the dog, mainly. We wouldn't 'a' found ye 'fore morning, no way, if it hadn't ben fer him. I callate, too, ye best hev a doctor come in," Levi continued, feeling of Vance's swollen hand and foot. "We sot the bones best we could, but mebbe 'twa'n't right," and then this practical woodsman began breakfast-getting.

"Please get my portfolio out of my trunk," Vance next asked, interrupting in this, and then

left-handed, perforce, and sitting up he scrawled the following laconic message to Ollie :

“Dear little girl—I am wrecked—right arm broken—sprained ankle—no danger. Doctor sent for—write soon, please.”

But Douglas was called upon later to direct the envelope.

John, the boy, and the dog were next dispatched to the Mills with a list of things wanted and a final, “Bring the doctor, if you have to handcuff him,” from Vance, after which he became the sole charge of the two men left in camp. Levi now disclosed qualities Vance had never even guessed he possessed. He first gathered a big bouquet of wild flowers to place beside the crippled man’s bed; he next constructed a rude couch to stand on the piazza. With Douglas to aid, he then filled every grain-sack about the cabin and log stable with dry moss and cedar twigs. He bathed Vance’s swollen ankle for an hour with hot water, and that afternoon constructed a crutch for him.

“Ye kin use it better’n ye s’pose,” he said encouragingly. “Jest tip well over to left, step keerful, ’n’ ye’ll soon find ye git on easy.” And so Vance found, later on. It was a long day for Vance, however, but in due time Levi began

supper preparations, leaving him alone with his glum reflections, and to count how soon a letter from Ollie could reach him.

Just then from far down the lake came the faint "plink-plink" of a banjo and the "Row away, row, o'er the waters so blue" chorus of an old-time plantation song!

A weird and almost ghostly effect was wrought by those unseen, unknown singers, as if a spectral quartette from the Louisiana Lowlands had dropped into this silent wilderness. There was no other sound, not a ripple on the lake, and so still was the afternoon that Vance, listening, spell-bound, could catch the finer contralto tones mingling with a tenor voice. But it was the bass voice, a deep, sonorous, rolling one, that impressed him most, for it so recalled a classmate of his who led the college glee club, and who, the students all agreed, "could sing 'way down cellar, and then some."

And nearer, though slowly, drew those invisible singers, even as if four instead of two dusky lovers were floating down the Tombigbee River in "My Gum-Tree Canoe." Vance was by this time still more impressed with that sonorous bass voice, and more certain that it must be his own classmate, Sprague. "Big John" they used

to call him, and then as the last "My Gum-Tree Canoe" passed into the silent forest, there came voices and a ripple of girlish laughter, mingling with the continuing "plink-plink" of the banjo. Soon another plantation song, "Roll, Jordan, Roll," came up the lake, then Vance knew it was Big John leading, for this had been his favorite song at college. By this time Levi and Douglas were beside Vance on the piazza, and just then three canoes with seven occupants appeared around the bend. Very slowly they advanced, while still came that deep bass, "Roll, Jordan, Roll."

How that quaint old darky hymn echoed across the lake, back from its high bank, then up to the mountain-side, to return in a long rolling ensemble of wondrous charm!

Vance turned to his old guide. "Go to meet them at the landing, Levi," he directed, "and say Mr. Vance Harper sends his compliments to Dr. John Sprague and party, and bids them welcome to Uncle Terry's cabin."

"By Jove!" he added, next addressing Douglas, "but I am in luck. John studied to be a surgeon, you see."

And five minutes later the left hand of Vance was clasped by the two big ones of his old college mate.

"I'll fix you, old boy," he said to Vance, half

tenderly, half joyously, "just as soon as I start our guides tent-setting. And this evening we will all call and make you twice glad."

"Better pitch your tents just to the right here at the base of the mountain, John," came next from Vance, "and all you'll need is a camp-fire. Have your guides use our big fireplace to cook by; we've plenty of wood, all dry. I'll have my two men rig you up a table close by your tents right off, and if there is anything you need, just grab it." Thus did Vance welcome his old class-mate.

"We will grab your arm first," John responded laughingly. "That is, if I find it needs it."

He returned ten minutes later, unbound the broken arm, pressed his fingers deep into the swollen flesh, while Vance ground his teeth, and then smiled. "It's all right, old boy, and a good job," he announced, "and now we'll pad it into an easier position." The sprained ankle came next for treatment, and within an hour Vance felt almost like laughing himself. He next had Levi wash and shave him, then cut one sleeve from an outing shirt, and dress him in a more civilized way, and just at twilight Vance lay stretched once more upon his piazza couch, when who should follow "Big John" but Mr. and Mrs. Hale and a very

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pretty petite young lady, "Miss Daisy Deane," as Dr. John presented her.

Almost the first remark Mrs. Hale made to Vance was: "I wish our mutual friend, Ollie, were here now, Mr. Harper. It certainly would make this party quite complete."

"It would for me personally," replied Vance, "more, probably, than she might think."

"But you may be quite mistaken in that," smiling archly; "it might be pleasanter for you both, however, to wait until you have two arms in serviceable shape. I doubt if any lover can do his duty with only one arm." And then a laugh came in which all joined.

But the twilight hour, the three tents close by, in front of which glowed a cheery camp-fire, the placid lake now reflecting a rising moon, were all more conducive to song than conversation, and soon Dr. John brought a banjo and with, "Come, Daisy Deane, it's down in the meadows for you," sat down with the rest on the piazza benches. Then came that long-ago namesake song of hers while she played soft chords on her banjo. And what an old-time medley followed! All the familiar college songs, those of the long-ago plantation days, love-songs a century old, up to the latest, "Oh, You Coon," in a hit-or-miss order,

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while Vance smoked in calm content or joined in some song he knew. He wished *she* were there to add her voice to the chorus.

When his guests were about to depart, he extended a characteristic welcome.

"My friends," he said, "this lake is teeming with trout and salmon. You can't find a better camping-site or more charming surroundings in the State. We have a log ice-house up back of the cabin that you are welcome to use; plenty of venison, or lamb, as we call it, just now in cold storage, and if you wish to help a crippled man you will stay here until you must go out of the woods. Your company is a godsend to me."

He noted, also, as the four strolled away that the petite one's hand was clasped by Dr. John. "It's the old, old story," Vance thought. "I wonder if *she* will ever feel like being led by me."

Levi was up and Vance awake when the bird concert began next morning, and they had eaten breakfast before the head guide of his guests came to use their convenient fireplace. Levi also lent a hand and a pan of hot grilled venison was added to the campers' table later on; for the fact was that Vance meant to keep these people with him during their entire outing, if possible.

"Our visitors will go fishing after breakfast,"

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he said to Levi, while they were eating it, "and then I want you to take a sly look over their stores. They probably have the usual outfit of ham, pork, hardtack, coffee, etc., but I want you to bake them some biscuits for dinner, have a pan of them hot for supper, corn-bread for their breakfast to-morrow, and a pot of hot baked beans later on. To-night we will send them two pairs of broiled partridges for supper. We have quite a string left in the ice-house, and you must add some top onions out of our garden."

Of course Dr. John called on Vance later to examine his arm, and soon his party all started for a morning's fishing. And thus left behind, Vance grew lonesome. The evening previous with its singing, two jauntily dressed ladies and pleasant exchanges, had seemed to Vance like one in the city once more, but, left alone, his crippled condition gave him the blues. "But what's the use?" he growled. "If a fellow begins recalling his own troubles, it's all off for him." Then Uncle Terry's, "Count yer blessin's, boy, count yer blessin's," next recurred. And Vance did count them, Ollie first, who, albeit she had not admitted a hint of love, even, had yet chided him for apparent neglect, which augured well. The finding of the stolen gems came next. The

mountain itself, now rich in tourmalines, with a goodly quantity already secured, and friends here for a few days' company. The Professor and Myra were due to arrive later, and, last of all, his broken arm was only a question of a few weeks' loss of time. And so his counting of blessings worked its weal. That afternoon John returned bringing many needed things, but no doctor.

"Him have one ver' sick woman, who want to die," John reported, whereupon Vance smiled.

"Maybe she has reason to feel that way," he said, knowing what sort of a doctor would locate at the Mills.

A letter also came from Ollie which added a trifle more of good cheer. "Both your letters received at same time," she wrote, "and fortunately I read the last one first. I trust you will pardon me for complaining of delay. If your letters were not of some interest I should not care if they never came. I understand how you feel, and let me assure you I have and am still trying my best not to feel the same way, for obvious reasons." And then Vance felt as if a new world had opened its bright portals, for this was the first sweet hint he had ever received from this "wary, chary, and charming maid," as he thought her to be.

Love, like the hope of life, catches at straws.

CHAPTER XXV

THAT grilled venison was delicious this morning and a welcome change from our regular diet," was Dr. John's salutation that second evening when he called upon Vance after supper. "And those top onions with new biscuit added a good relish to our dinner. But those broiled partridges this evening, why, words fail me! And in June, too."

"Well," said Vance, now upright on his piazza couch, "guests are a rarity here, in fact, your party are the first in ten months, and I mean to keep you as long as I can. As for the birds, I've had them in the ice-house since last winter, three dozen of them."

"And where did the big pan of water-lilies we found on the table this noon come from?" the doctor continued. "The next surprise I expect will be strawberries."

"You shall have them, too, if you will stay two weeks longer. As for the lilies, I sent Pip after them to a swamp pond below here, half a mile." Then the big man drew a bench up beside Vance, produced a cigar-case, and after the two

had lit up, began questioning Vance about his mine and how it had panned out. "You have no worry coming," he asserted after Vance had outlined his success so far, "and as soon as your arm is O. K. I see no reason why you can't smell salt air for a month. From what Mrs. Hale told us, I guess you will."

"Perhaps,"—smiling, "I mean to try it, anyhow, and if the sea breeze is not too chilly, I may stay a day or two." And just then a new plan flashed into the mind of Vance (always air-castle building) and that was to send Sherman a check for his loan, get the Professor to oversee putting the *Vixen* in order, hire an engineer, and, bringing Myra, meet him at the Cape harbor.

"My suggestion has set you mooning, I see," rejoined the doctor, smiling, "but come back to Erin. Where in the whole world could you find a fairer view than we have right here?"

It was a picture worth seeing. To the right, the three white tents outlined against the steep green slope of the mountain. In front of these sat the two women wearing bright-colored wraps. Beyond, sloping down to the lake-shore, lay a broad plat of greensward with five canoes drawn well out upon the sandy beach, while over all a full moon added her silver sheen.

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"We had planned a canoe trip on the lake this evening," Dr. John said, rising, "but I hate to leave you alone, Vance. Why can't you join us? Your big man, John, and I can carry you to a canoe if need be."

"Oh, I have one leg doing business at the old stand," laughed Vance, "and with my crutch I can hop fairly well." A few minutes later, well propped by Levi's grain-bag cushions, Vance joined the wildwood flotilla on a singing tour around the moonlit lake.

The scene became even more picturesque than when viewed from the piazza of Uncle Terry's cabin. The moon's silvery path always leading away from each observer, the dark enclosing wilderness, and the somber silence that almost seemed to creep out from beneath the overhanging trees, all added to the eerie impression. An occasional night-call, a loon's long "halloo" from up the lake, an owl's hoot from the mountain-side, and finally one sharp "yaowl" from some far-off swamp, emphasized this solemn stillness. But not for long, for soon the plink of a banjo came from the leading canoe, the other two drew up to it, and then away fled all somberness, banished by the merry lilt of a barn-dance solo. Songs came next, the old-time ones once more, and Vance

thought while they echoed from shore to shore, "If even a bob-cat, lynx, bear, or deer is watching us from the shadows, they must wonder what queer voices have invaded their primal haunts."

There was good reason, for never since the blessings of laughter and song were vouchsafed man, had that long narrow lake been thus saluted. It was more than charming to all the party. A mirthful, tender, jolly, happy-go-lucky defiance to the grim surrounding forest. A singing "go-hide-yourself" to all yellow-eyed "varmints," growling bears, or even the spirits of the many red men who had once paddled their bark canoes around this same sequestered lake. But when the two hours of song and laughter had ended and Vance was once more in his cheerless cabin, one absent face was with him, and an oft-repeated, "Oh, if only she could have been with us to-night!" kept recurring.

Love is at once the most Heaven-opening or heart-piercing illusion that comes to us in life. It measures the breadth, depth, and height of all joy, and all sorrow. And once its sweet pain, once the arrow of Cupid, has entered the human heart, only satiety can heal the wound. Viewing it as most cynics do, that grim ogre becomes a merciful angel.

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Vance, however, did not so consider it just now. To him with youth and red blood pulsing in his veins, with love of a home of his own, with a fair queen to reign over it, in his mind, and that one, supreme above all others, far away, his wildwood cabin was but a prison pen.

His visitors, however, helped to pass a week for him with less gloom, for which he was duly grateful. They also enjoyed it with all the zest of newness, during which time Vance satisfied one little ambition of his own, which was to stock a small trout-pool close by the cabin. There happened to be a good-sized boiling spring issuing from the base of the mountain, perhaps thirty rods back from the cabin. Just below this Uncle Terry had years before dug a deep basin to hold an ample supply of the sweet cold water. From this a rill wound its way down to the lake, passing just back of his small garden. Below this a few rods was a rock-walled basin into which the streamlet poured, to emerge again through a natural gate in the rock. To build a little dam here and thus fill this basin had occurred to Vance in early spring. Also to catch and stock it with trout, just to feed and watch, as he thought. Now with his guests anxious to fish, but unable to eat one-tenth of what they could catch, it seemed an

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opportune time to carry out his plan. He did so at once, directing his men to build the dam as soon as possible, screening the stream's exit with small stones, and soon the two-rod-wide basin began to fill.

Slat-cars were next constructed for towing after canoes, and the third morning after his surprise-party arrived, the two men started for the lake's head to fish, accompanied by the ladies, with Vance to look on. Within three days they had caught and transferred to this pool of translucent water over two hundred trout of all sizes, the largest weighing over four pounds. Levi, knowing the habits of speckled beauties, had constructed a log shelter across one corner of the pool for them to hide under, and so Vance's unique plan was carried out.

"Some on 'em'll come in handy next winter, if anybody's here," Levi suggested, peering down into the five-foot pool to watch the white-finned school of trout slowly swimming around it.

"That's true, and you will probably be the one, Levi," Vance rejoined, smiling, "and when Sunday comes you and the rest might as well add a few hundred more fish. The pool will hold them all."

But all pleasant days pass too soon, and so did

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these to the visiting ones. They fished a few mornings more, adding a hundred trout to Vance's pool, inspected his drilling operations, now going on, saw one more pocket opened and a few dozen tourmalines taken out. Guided by Douglas, they also paid a visit to the split in the ridge that had nearly cost Vance his life. Here the mining expert made a careful investigation of this peculiar opening in the ridge or "hog-back," as usually called, and later on suggested what resulted in an astonishing discovery.

But when his visitors were ready to depart, so anxious was Vance to go with them and visit Uncle Terry for a week that only the Professor's promised outing here kept him back.

Perhaps he would soon obtain one consolation in the shape of an answer to his scrawled missive to Ollie. Ten days was certainly time enough for a reply to arrive at the Mills, he decided, and to that end directed John to go out with his guests and bring back his mail and also a few needed supplies. Vance also presented to each of his visitors a handsome green tourmaline for a keepsake. And then with many expressions of gratitude from each of them, and a "Wish you could stay all summer" from Vance, they departed early one morning.

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Vance watched them out of sight, oft waving his hat. His mine and increasing riches were of less interest to him just then than the enjoyable world outside, and now especially a sea-girt isle far away.

His expert, Douglas, revived his waning interest that noon quite decidedly.

"I believe, Mr. Harper," he said as they all sat down to dinner, "that the loose rocks in that split where your big sentinel is only hide a tourmaline pocket. They are nearly all broken up albite, the walls are grey and purple lapidolite, evidently split apart by volcanic action, and just for luck, I'd like to take all hands over there this afternoon and see what we can find."

And Vance readily consented, wishing he could also go once more to see that green, blinking, evil eye. "If you can dig it out for me, I wish you would," he directed Douglas. "I want to keep that bit of stone to look at now."

That afternoon was almost endless to Vance, entirely alone now. He smoked grimly on his couch for two hours, then tried to sleep but couldn't, next lit his pipe, and with his crutch hopped step by step over to his trout-pool. He lay down beside it on the bare rock. Tossed bits of wood or sticks in to watch trout rise to them. Found a

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caterpillar crawling near by. Tossed that into the pool to see a trout leap out of water as he snapped the morsel. For an hour Vance thus amused himself with his new pets, then hopped back to the piazza again. The sun was now well down in the west, almost to the horizon line. The breeze died away, leaving the lake unruffled. A silence more profound than ever before seemed to settle over cabin, lake, and all around. Vance consulted his watch. "Past seven," he muttered, "and by Jove, I'm getting hungry. Wish the boys would fetch in."

It was almost dark ere he heard their voices up back of the cabin, and then, with Pip's dog leading, the three appeared. "Well, what luck, Douglas?" Vance queried indifferently. "Get my evil eye, did you?"

"I did," replied Douglas with a droll look, "and just a few good eyes also." Then drawing a bench up to Vance on the couch, he began to empty his many pockets. Handful after handful of big green tourmalines he now piled beside the astonished Vance. Fully two quarts of them. "Beauties, aren't they?" he said, "and extra-big, too. That pile is worth fifty thousand dollars, if it's worth a penny."

"And you shall have a thousand for your sug-

gestion," rejoined Vance gleefully, and then the two shook hands.

"But the end is not yet," added Douglas; "we haven't half emptied that pocket. We worked until almost dark, then hiked for camp. I believe we shall find as many more to-morrow."

That evening, listening to the account of how easily this more than wonderful pocket was opened, how for centuries a fortune had lain there, hidden only by a few loose stones, Vance marveled much over the devious ways of good or ill luck. How he had been lured by this evil green stone to get kicked and cuffed by Fate, or a hoodoo, as it were. How only the chance thought of Douglas had been the means of discovery, with the curiosity of his visitors as an aid. And how now, with gems worth almost a quarter-million dollars in hand or in sight, what need for him to remain here a prisoner any longer? A fortune, double any he had ever hoped for, was now his, and yet in spite of that, in spite of the final banishment of his green hoodoo, here he was with a useless arm still hanging in a sling, and unable to move except by means of a crippled hop. After all, what were riches compared to the use of one's limbs and health?

That night he dreamed of trying to buy Uncle Terry's island.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN Ollie received a letter postmarked "Milton Mills," and directed in an unknown hand, a sudden heart-pang came. Its pitifully scrawled contents relieved her feelings quite decidedly, however; for though Vance was crippled, he was not in any serious danger. He had been in her mind a good deal lately, especially so since his previous letter. This was more outspoken than any before, a direct statement that she held his heart in her keeping. She had answered this as was her wont, with few words, but truthful ones, declaring that she had tried and should continue trying to keep him out of her mind.

"In a way, that is a confession that he is in my thoughts," she said to herself, reading her own letter over, "but he has no right to assume anything, for all that. And he won't, either; it isn't his way. It will be a direct 'Will you' when the time comes. And I—I must say 'No.' " And then another pang, one of self-pity, came to this peculiar girl, whose sense of duty lifted her above

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her own selfish longings. But Vance, hale, hearty, and boldly fighting for fortune in the woods, was one thing ; while the same man, crippled and almost helpless and utterly without books or any companionship in his lone cabin, was quite another matter. She knew him well now ; knew his high sense of honor, his keen imagination, his proud spirit, his need of sympathy, also of some one to exchange opinions with, in fact, a companion of kindred spirit. Deep down in her heart she knew, also, that he needed her and meant to win her if within his power.

Just now he was alone, helpless, and surely despondent. She could not think what to say to him or what to do. To write him as her feelings prompted, she dared not. To write him a cool, friendly letter, like all hers in the past, seemed like handing chips to a starving man, and so Ollie was utterly baffled. Neither could she confide in Uncle Terry without his keen eyes reading what must be kept from him. But her moods, like the tides, ebbed and flowed with unvarying certainty. And that night in her room with the ocean's "gone away" calling to her and the flood-tide of feeling on, she wrote him a tender, sympathetic letter, revealing her affection for him as she had never before done. If he read between

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the lines, he must see in it the promised fulfilment of his hopes. It was so outspoken that Ollie, reading it over, felt herself blush. "I'll wait till morning, then being cooler it may read differently," she declared. "As Uncle Terry says, 'Write as mad or as glad as you choose, but wait a day before sending it.' I'd better wait." And wait she did, with the result that she tore the letter into shreds.

That day after school she received another letter that set her pulses throbbing. This was from her old schoolmate in Bristol. The letter was an urgent invitation to join in a two-weeks' canoe trip into the woods, which this schoolmate and her husband were about to take, accompanied by Letty Marlowe.

"We are all anxious to see the mine of your friend, Mr. Harper," she concluded, "and I am sure you must be, since your uncle is interested in it, which means you in time. Letty has told us all about what a pretty spot the lake is, near the mine, what good fishing there is, and how easily it can be reached in canoes. It seems she gets this from her uncle, Professor Moss. Now I know your school closes 'in one week more, so there is nothing to keep you back, and you must go. We shall take tents, of course, one for you and me, and one for the two guides and Fred."

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Another heart-pang came to Ollie, with another complication. She had hoped many times to take such a trip. To see the wilderness as it was was like an entry into another world to her. To visit the cabin Uncle Terry had built so many years ago was also a keen anticipation to her.

But then there was Vance ! What would he think of her to rush into the woods, now that he was crippled ? Would it not be a tacit approval of his hopes and wishes ? And even if she went with friends, would it not be the same ? She knew, also, that he would reason that if she meant never to say " Yes," no power could force her to set foot in his camp. Likewise that no matter what his conclusions might be, he was chivalrous enough to respect her to the utmost, and no hint of love would ever come while she was at his camp. And so the pros and cons of this attractive plan were balanced one against the other. All that evening, in fact, she gave them thought, and yet her own decision still hung in the balance. Her heart, in spite of all sense of duty, kept saying, " Yes, go and cheer him ; it can do no harm." But her head said, " No, it is unwise for both of us. I can't grant what he will sooner or later ask, and it is unkind to him to arouse any false hopes."

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One thing she did do that was wise, and that was to lay the matter before Uncle Terry the next morning on her way to school.

"Wal," he said after an unusually long consideration of the matter, "I dunno hardly what to advise ye to do, girlie. It all depends on yer own feelin's. O' course, ye'll hev a good time, seein' the woods 'n' canoein'. It'll be a new life to ye. I know what 'tis, 'n' jest now is the time to go. Ez fer him, sorter hung up ez it war, wal, young faces, 'n' yours 'specially, will seem mighty good to him. I wish I could send him a basket o' lobes or mess o' clams. They'd do his stomach 'most ez much good ez yer face will his feelin's. But do ez ye feel best, girlie, 'n' rec'lect that what comfort ye miss to-day—you, or anybody else—won't come to-morrer. It's only once these best o' all hours in life happen along."

"Non-committal and never before like this," thought Ollie, now stepping ashore at the wharf. "And I can't understand it. I think, however, he guesses my feelings, and maybe that is the reason he won't say go or stay." All that day in school she kept balancing the go or not-go decision in her mind, with neither fully determined for long. By noon, when as usual, now that summer had come, she betook herself to the rocky shore and a

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shady nook to eat dinner, it was, "Yes, I'll go and enjoy it all, as I know I shall. And it will please him so to see me." But by night, when Uncle Terry came for her, it was "No" in her own mind once again.

"I think ye may repent it later on, girlye," he said tenderly, after she had announced her decision. "We ain't young but once in this world, 'n' trips like that are—wal, like summer days, what ye want to hang onto all ye kin. If it's me ye're thinkin' on, fergit it. It won't be more 'n two weeks or so, 'n', wal, ye'll seem wuth all the more to us then. Better go, girlye, better go."

His tender love, his thoughtful care for her, recurred to Ollie as never before. Back again, as many times before, she flew in thought to that day and moment when she, desolate, heart-broken and badly frightened, had heard the dull thud of sod upon her mother's coffin. How she had been led away sobbing by stranger hands. How for days, weeks, and months she had fought against her fears and desperate loneliness with no one to utter one word of sympathy. How it had come to her in the little bare attic room of Ben Halliday's home that she was a pauper child and would have to bear everything and do everything, or

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else starve. She had reason to be thankful for even food and shelter, poor as they were.

And then came Uncle Terry, tender care, a pretty room, new clothes, food that tasted good, her wants considered, her wishes understood beforehand, in short, a home that seemed a Heaven to her. It had never changed, except to grow more so, from that day twelve years ago, until now. Now her foster-father was urging her to a meeting, a visit with one who might want to rob him of her. It was a revelation and loving wish, almost past her understanding.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN late the next afternoon Vance saw John paddling up the lake with long, steady strokes, he was so anxious for the expected letter that he seized his crutch and hobbled down to the landing. Only one from the Professor rewarded him, and then Vance felt keen disappointment, for he expected that surely *she* would write by return mail in answer to his pathetic scrawl. "Why, she must be away or else my letter was delayed," he said to himself, opening the one received. "She couldn't be so heartless." Cheering news came from the Professor, however, who wrote :

"I have at last received payment for all the original lot of tourmalines and the total is \$46,410.80, which is now to our credit in the bank. Have made our plans to be with you by the twentieth ; quite a party of us, too. In fact, we join Mr. and Mrs. Miner and my niece, Letty, from Bristol. I guess you will need both our tents set up. Be sure to have some venison on ice."

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Then it occurred to Vance that he had quite forgotten to write the Professor the morning he sent his scrawl to Ollie. "By Jove," he next thought, looking at the date of this letter, a week previous, "and to-day is the eighteenth!"

"We have company coming, John," he next said to his cook. "Two men, three ladies, and probably three guides. I want you to bring in a deer early to-morrow morning and hang him in the ice-house to cool. We must also set up both tents, bed them well with twigs and moss, and enlarge that table you made for our other guests. Then we must rig that big canvas cover to our boiler over it, in case a rainy day comes." Vance also outlined his plans to Levi that evening, with instructions that all hands join in making ready to care for so many. The next day was a busy one in camp; John brought in his deer before sunrise, in fact shot it not twenty rods from the cabin; the tents were set up and, to add charm, thatched by overlapping spruce-boughs. A canvas canopy was rigged over the enlarged table, dry wood cut, the cabin swept and put in order, and by night Vance was all ready for his expected company. Pip and Douglas were also directed to go fishing the next morning, for Vance said, "There is no telling how soon our friends will arrive."

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But that evening, in spite of the minor excitement of getting ready, Vance sat glum and morose, puffing his pipe steadily, without one word to Levi or the rest who sat on the piazza near him. The sunset glow faded from the horizon, the stars began to twinkle, two loons to "Hallooo" to one another, an owl to call, "Hoo, hoo" from the mountain-side, and yet Vance smoked on in grim silence, for the only one who claimed his thoughts had now apparently ignored him. He had wanted to make the Professor and Myra's long planned visit an enjoyable one. For the others he had less interest, yet as visitors he would surely do his best to make them welcome. Just why this Mr. and Mrs. Miner had joined with the Professor, Vance was uncertain.

He did not care, however. They were nice people, no doubt, and their one redeeming feature was that they were friends of Ollie. And now after smoking for over an hour, just as the late-rising moon appeared, Vance spoke once more. "Levi," he said, "the Professor, his sister, and the rest now on the way, will probably stay here two weeks. When they go out I shall go with them. Do you think my ankle will stand that mile walk around the long carry by that time?"

"Wal, hardly," responded Levi, after thinking.

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"That is, it won't 'thout ye use it some every day from now to then. That way it might stand it. But we'll git ye out, some way," he added buoyantly, "if John 'n' I hev to carry ye on a stretcher. I might run the rapids with ye," he continued a moment later, "but ez ye couldn't swim now, I'd rather not try it. But we'll git ye out, never fear.

"Shall ye stay away long?" he asked after filling his pipe once more.

"Oh, a month probably, and meantime you will take charge of the camp, send John out for stores when needed, while Douglas will look after the drilling work." Then Vance once more began to outline his own plans. First, to return to the city, pay Sherman for the loan on his boat, have a much-needed interview with his tailors, stock the *Vixen* for a month's cruise, and with the Professor and Myra aboard start for the Cape harbor. And just then it occurred to him how pleasant it would be to hand Uncle Terry a check for perhaps twenty thousand dollars as his first royalty payment.

He arose early the next morning, was shaved and dressed by Levi, "my valet," as he had begun to call him, and after breakfast he issued his orders. "Our visitors are due to-day, boys," he

said, "and we must be ready for them. I want you, Pip, to go after pond-lilies, John to pick a basketful of wild-flowers, while Douglas will go after a big mess of trout, and Levi will do the camp work and put everything in tidy shape. I think," he added to Levi after the rest had departed, "that you would better fix up a table in each of the two tents, and put a bench in, also. And we shall need two or three more. You have planks and tools to make them, I know. We are all right on eatables," he continued, smiling, "but shy on seatables. I wish we had some vases for flowers, but tin pails must answer. If, as I expect, my friends arrive this afternoon, we will give them trout, broiled partridges, and hot biscuit for supper, and grilled venison for breakfast." And thus Vance made his preparations to welcome his guests.

But noon came with no sight of them, after which the men kept busy collecting more "whisker" moss and fir-twigs for beds, while Vance smoked, waited and watched down the lake impatiently. One, two, three hours passed and then he saw three canoes with four bright-colored parasols above them appear, one at a time, from around a bend in the lake. And then Vance, with Levi and John beside him, hobbled

down to the landing. A merry "Hello" with waving of hats and parasols greeted him from afar, and then Vance, to his complete astonishment, saw—Ollie!

The Professor, with Myra, was first to step ashore and both almost rushed upon Vance.

"Why, you poor, dear fellow, what does this mean?" were Myra's first words, grasping his left hand as he stooped to kiss her.

"And we never knew of it till now," added the Professor, next obtaining his hand. "When and how did it happen?"

"Oh, it's nothing, only a tumble off a ridge," laughed Vance. "I'm crippled some, but still in the ring."

Ollie was the next to greet him.

"I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Harper," she said, her eyes shining, "but so sorry to see you in such a plight," and then Vance clasped her proffered hand.

"I'm all right," he answered wonderingly and looking down into her eyes, "but how—why,—well—this is the surprise of my life. But didn't you ——" then stopped just in time. "I mean," he added incoherently, "that I supposed your friends, the Hales, must have met you coming in," smiling calmly now. "They left here four

days ago and you ought to have met them at the Mills."

It was a quick thought and an adroit shift that brought a grateful glance from Ollie.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Miner were introduced, Letty shook the left hand of Vance, and the gathering group slowly advanced to the tents and cabin. And what exclamations of delight from the women followed over everything, the tents, flowers, tables, bough-beds, and all!

"Why, it's like a picture," declared Myra, following her brother and Vance up to his couch.

"Well, I had our boys make ready," he said, "and all you good people have to do now is eat, sleep, and go fishing."

"But tell me about your accident," she said, anxiously, "and how it happened," which of course he had to do.

"But how about *her*?" he said, eagerly glancing over to the big tent with the other women in front. "What good spirit led her to join you three?"

"Oh, it was an odd but quite agreeable doubling up," responded Myra, smilingly. "You see, Mrs. Miner had invited Letty and Ollie to go before I wrote Letty, and the result was that we all planned to meet and come in together. Wasn't it nice—for you?"

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"More than nice, a godsend in fact. But ——" and then Vance paused, for he now realized that Ollie for some occult reason had kept their correspondence a secret.

"Well, what is it?" continued Myra, smiling at him knowingly. "You started to say something, now do it."

"Oh, nothing," smilingly, "except I wish I weren't so crippled," then he added a brief outline of his other guests' visit and how lucky it was that one happened to be a doctor. "I am all right, Myra," he concluded, "only I can't show you around as I wish. Pro must do that. I can go fishing with you, however, and direct things here. I shall have Levi and John cook for you folks, too. They are good ones, and neat, which goes far in camp life." Then as the Professor joined them, Vance explained how he meant to entertain them all. "I have something to show you, also," he added, smiling and leading the way into the cabin. He unlocked a trunk, pulled out a pile of wearing apparel, and next plumped four canvas bags of tourmalines on the plank floor before the Professor and Myra.

"Worth almost two hundred thousand," he whispered, "as nearly as I can figure."

Myra almost fainted.

"Why, you can't mean it!" she gasped, looking around. "And only that common trunk to keep them in. Why, it isn't safe."

"Well, yes and no," rejoined Vance coolly. "But my men are all honest, I believe, and we never leave the cabin unlocked. Besides we buried Peg-leg, you know." And then Myra joined the other women at the big tent.

An addition to it had also been made by Levi, for as only one of the two tents brought was needed for the arriving guides, he had spread the other for a carpet in the large one. A half-hour later a very merry party gathered around the table in front, with Vance at one end and Myra beside him. How astonished the newcomers were when Levi set a panful of broiled partridges in front of them with another pan heaped high with well-browned trout.

"It's live to eat here," Vance said as Pip began to fill tin cups with coffee, "so pitch in, good people, and no ceremony." And they did, for their dinner that day was a sardine-and-cracker one below the long carry.

"We are long on backwoods dainties, Miss Oaks," he said, addressing her, "but short on lobsters, and your arrival has set my mouth watering for them."

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"Well, I am no lobster," she laughed, "but I wish I could have brought you some. Uncle said he would like to send you a basket of them. His pound is so full that it's a sight."

As it was not yet sunset, the party inspected the cabin, and Ollie was particularly interested in this. "And to think," she said to Vance, after looking it over, "that Uncle believed he and Auntie could live here all their lives. Of course, it's big, and as comfortable as a log cabin can be, and nice in summer, but think of winter here as you have described it."

"You forget the romantic side. That would count for a little, wouldn't it?"

"In midsummer with moonlight and companionable friends, yes; but for two old people like them in winter, it would be like a cold prison. And they have no illusions left," she added, smiling at Vance. "Why, it would need more than I ever had to stand it a week then."

"But now, with so many friends, it is different, isn't it?"

"Of course," calmly, "and more romantic and picturesque than I even hoped on the way in. I have been dreaming of this very thing for years," she added hastily. "Your press stories giving the winter side didn't spoil my dreams, so you see I have one illusion left, Mr. Cynic."

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"I hope more than one," he responded, smiling at her name for him. "And when the moon is up and we hear our lynx and loon friends calling, maybe you will feel the romance in reality."

"And Letty will be scared so she won't sleep a wink, or Luke, either," Ollie concluded, now turning to follow the rest away from the cabin, then halted as Vance lay back on his couch. "Can't you come, too?" she asked. "It's light yet and we want to see your fish-pond. I will walk slowly." And for this thought of him Vance felt grateful.

So first securing a few crackers and bits of meat to feed the trout, he limped along beside *her*, quite content for so much.

The sun was big and red just above the horizon. A glow from it lit up the pool alive with restless trout, and as Vance tossed bits of food to them, dozens leaped up to snap the morsels. For quite a while the group sat around this much-alive pool, watching the white-finned prisoners; then just as twilight began, from way up the lake came the usual evening "Hallooo."

"Why, who is that?" questioned Letty anxiously. "It's a man, isn't it?"

"Oh, no, only one of our always-present friends with a long neck and purple eyes," Vance explained,

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"and there are two more who will call to us later, and they have yellow eyes."

They did, also, just as the entire party had gathered in front of the big tent and the "Yaoul" and "Hoo-hoo" that came quavering through the shadows added the one needed touch to wildwood romance. The more beautiful one came an hour after when the late rising moon smiled over a green-clad mountain, and then the ladies became enraptured. The scene well deserved rapture, for the two log cabins, half in shadow to the left of the party, were suggestive of an Indian's abode. The canoes, now shining in the moonlight, added to that. The open camp-fire increased the illusion, and made the white tents merely emblems of a white man's invasion.

"All we need," suggested Ollie, guessing the thoughts of the rest, "is to see a veritable Red Man come paddling down the lake and pull his canoe out of water."

"Or a dozen of them skulking along in the shadows, tomahawk in hand," added Vance.

"I should run to the cabin as fast as I could," rejoined Mrs. Miner.

"And me too," asserted Letty. "I don't think I shall sleep a wink to-night. Everything looks bogeyish to me. I almost expect to see an Indian's

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ghost, feathers and all, stalk out of the woods any moment."

And just then, as if to answer her fears, came another ominous "Yaooul" from across the lake.

"Our friend is drawing near," put in Vance, smiling at Ollie, who sat next to Letty on a blanket. "He will be around just back of us very soon."

"And swim the lake to do it, of course!" with faint sarcasm from Ollie, who had read up on wild animals.

"No, hardly," drawled Vance, still wishing to tease the timid one, "but wildcats can outrun a deer, and that prowler will come around the lake within half an hour."

"I see you can be an illusion-maker as well as destroyer," Ollie rejoined, slyly, nudging Letty, "but you ought not to give them yellow eyes."

"No, I prefer blue," he returned boldly. "In fact, the only tangible one I have left has blue eyes." And then Ollie decided not to continue that exchange further before so many. Just then also there came from the new cabin where the guides were the unique sound of a mouth-organ piping out "Old Dan Tucker." "That's Pip, alias 'Friday,' I told you about, Miss Oaks," Vance explained, "and he is quite an artist with

that instrument. If he hears a tune once, he will repeat it on that in a short time. We had a banjo-player here last week with your friends, the Hales, and since then Pip has been encoring all her tunes. That is one." This continued for half an hour and sounded all the better for being a short distance away.

"I'd like to go canoeing out on the lake to-morrow evening," said Mrs. Miner, "and all sing. Why can't we, Mr. Harper?"

"Nothing to hinder," he answered, "and we will do so. Also take Pip along. Miss Oaks has some songs I want to hear once more." And then the circling group lapsed into silence.

Not so the night, however, for two whippoorwills across the lake kept up their plaintive calls, a half-dozen bullfrogs added a sonorous croaking, the brook close by joined its faint tinkle, and, to bring an eerie interest, from far away once more came the prolonged hoot of an owl.

"Uncanny, isn't it?" queried Vance, addressing Ollie again, "but more so when one is alone."

"And superstitious," she smilingly said in answer. "I thought I had none of that, but I am sure if I were alone here, I'd grow so in no time. Why, the silence around here seems to crawl out of the shadows, and in spite of so many here, I

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keep watching for spectral shapes. I think I know now where your green hoodoo came from."

"I know too," laughed Vance, "and I have the 'critter' locked in my trunk. I'll show him to you to-morrow," and as this seemed an opportune time, he gave a brief statement of how he met mishap.

Had it been daylight, he would have seen a deep concern in one pair of blue eyes. "Why, you came near dying," their owner said when he finished his simply told tale.

"Oh, yes," coolly. "But Friday's dog saved me. That time Friday was lucky for me."

CHAPTER XXVIII

OLLIE'S entirely unexpected arrival, while highly gratifying to Vance, placed him in an awkward position ; for he realized that propriety forbade paying marked attention to her. Yet, after two months, with only brief and infrequent letters, that was the very thing he most wanted to do. But it so happened the next morning that all but Mr. and Mrs. Miner and Ollie decided to visit the wonderful mountain, whereupon Vance suggested that they four try fishing. Consequently Ollie was soon comfortably seated in Levi's big canoe, with trolling-rod in hand and Vance to direct proceedings.

"I want to thank you," she said, as soon as they started, "for your quick thought on our arrival yesterday, and thus saving me from an unpleasant contretemps. As you had not written the Professor about your accident, of course I had to keep silent, or place us both in an undesirable position. Nor was I aware that he was to go in with us until we met. I supposed the Miners with Letty and myself made up the party."

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"I quickly guessed so," rejoined Vance, glad to have the matter explained, "and it was all my fault, and due to my haste in sending John out. The only people I thought of were you and a doctor."

"I didn't answer your pathetic missive," she continued, as if that also needed explanation, "because soon after it came I decided to join the Miners, so, of course, had no need to write you. I came on the spur of the moment, and if I had taken more time to think it over, I doubt if I should be here now."

"And why, please?"

"Well, it wasn't exactly proper, I think, without an invitation. I only decided to come because Luke said we were to camp by ourselves and not as your guests."

"But I shall so consider you all, and be glad of the chance," responded Vance, firmly, "so please forget that part. Besides, Uncle Terry still owns the cabin and mountains ; so you are not encroaching." And just then the steel rod Ollie held lightly was nearly yanked from her hand.

"Hang on, and let him run," shouted Vance, as the reel began to whir. "You're fast to a big one. Steady, now ; steady. Keep your tip up." And then as the sharp zip of the reel continued,



"HANG ON, AND LET HIM RUN."—Page 336.

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Ollie saw a streak of silvery white shoot out of the rippled lake astern. It described a curve, and then a glistening fish splashed into the water ten rods away.

"Why, he jumped out!" exclaimed Ollie gleefully, and then once more began the musical whir so dear to all fishermen's hearts. Once, twice more came that salmon's upleap and splash, while she held the rod fast and the line sped out; then a halt came.

"Now reel in fast," Vance directed, as Levi paddled sternward, and Ollie, breathless, with eyes sparkling, hands trembling, did so. One, two, three more sharp rushes that big fish made with the zipping reel measuring them. Then came a halt, and Ollie slowly reeled in her prize to see it dipped out by Levi's landing-net, and, unmeshed, flounder at his feet.

"Oh, don't kill it!" she pleaded as he seized it and raised a small club to deal the usual blow.

"But we must eat," replied Vance, and then as she shut her eyes, the blow fell and a beautiful five-pound salmon lay still, while rainbow tints mottled its silvery side.

Another was hooked within ten minutes, and after the same series of sharp rushes, while the line sped out, the reel zipped, the fish leaped, and

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Ollie's eyes sparkled, was also dipped out and dealt the same blow.

"That's enough," she then declared, as Levi began to rig her troll anew. "It's great fun, but the killing spoils it for me. I suppose you think I am silly," she added, laying the rod down, "but the way those fish fought for life and liberty was pathetic. And I think they were mates, too, poor things, and that made the death-blow seem worse."

"Why, yes," rejoined Vance, "and yet a merciful way, and better than to let them die a long, gasping death."

"No doubt of that, and I am probably foolish. But I would rather let some one else see it done. This rippling lake with the green woods all around is pleasanter to look at."

"Your will is law," he returned, smiling, "and so it shall be. But how would picking pond-lilies strike you just now?"

"Why, it would be lovely, of course, but where?" glancing around the wood-bordered shores.

"Oh, we'll show you." And at a nod, Levi turned about and away down the lake they sped to turn and enter a narrow, motionless, alder-canopied stream, scarce four feet wide. "You must lie low now," Vance next directed and then curled up, while both laughed at the awkward po-

sition. Levi slowly pushed or pulled the canoe onward up the bush-hidden brook, and emerged into a small circular pond, almost whitened by blooming lilies.

"Now, Miss Ollie, you can pick to your heart's content, and no more dull thuds," Vance explained. "But what is the difference after all?" he continued, smiling as Ollie began to pluck the blossoms greedily with bared hand and arm. "Both lilies and fish have life."

"Why, yes," still grasping the former eagerly, "but fish have feelings and active love of life."

"But it's killing just the same, isn't it?"

"Of course, but painless. Besides, flowers were created to be picked."

"But weren't fish created to be caught and eaten?"

"Probably, but I can let you hard-hearted men do it, can't I?"

"To be sure, and maybe you are right," admitted Vance, wishing only to make his fair guest feel at ease and happy, and at the same time enjoying her coming to this hidden lakelet. And she did to the fullest, until her skirt became limp from dripping water and a bushel or more of white lilies were heaped in the canoe.

"Well, what do you think of the Maine wilder-

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ness?" Vance next questioned, as Levi paddled down the bush-hidden stream again.

"Why, it is a new realm to me, beautiful, yet fearsome, too," Ollie answered. "I keep thinking vicious yellow eyes must be watching us just now from up back in the bushes. I wouldn't go into the woods alone for the world."

"That is the impress of solitude. If you should go a half-mile into the woods alone, every sound would become magnified tenfold, and you would be so frightened you would turn and run. I believe it takes good courage to face solitude. And yet it is an illusion," smiling.

"Is every mood an illusion with you?"

"In a way, yes, except those that prove to be stern facts. We all have many minor ones as well, some alluring and some repelling; for instance, your constant fear of big yellow eyes. The fact is that there probably isn't a pair of them within a mile of us. And if they saw you first, you wouldn't see them at all."

"And so fear is an illusion, also?"

"In most cases, yes, and due to not knowing the facts. Once primitive man trembled at every tornado blast, and fell prostrate at the sound of thunder. Now we enjoy watching the trees sway and creak in a gale."

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"Primitive humanity must have lived in constant fear. I don't wonder we have inherited so many superstitions."

"Neither do I, and realizing how our cave ancestors felt about earthquakes, volcanoes, trees shattered by bolts from the sky, and all such terrors, I wonder we don't all inherit insanity."

"Perhaps we are insane occasionally," responded Ollie, recalling some of her own moods. "I have often watched stormy waves lit by lightning and felt almost sure I saw uncanny monsters leaping from their white crests. I can well understand why the ancient Greeks saw Neptune astride a gigantic billow at night, and how our Indians were sure the Great White Spirit came leaping over the tree-tops amid the driving snow."

"I wish you had been here last winter, the day and night our cabin was buried under drifts higher than the roof. You would have seen White Spirits of all shapes and sizes, and the howling of Old Boreas would have made you quake, I imagine."

"I've no doubt of it," she rejoined, also smiling, "for we of the timid sex have more fears and superstitions than strong men. It's a weakness Nature has endowed us with."

"And I am quite glad it is so. What pleases men is to feel that womenkind need their pro-

tection, or more especially some one woman. That is why I am opposed to this suffragette mania. What do you think about it?"

"Well, there is—is some need of it," she hesitated, "especially in the better protection of homes that are cursed by drunken husbands. Also in the regulation of child labor. These are questions that more especially concern women, and if they could vote I believe in that respect it would prove a benefit to them. I do not think women ought to take up politics, however."

"In that I agree with you, only I do not like strong-minded women, especially the militant sort who use bricks, bombs, and horsewhips for arguments. If they would go at vote-getting as they do lover-winning, they would get votes easily enough. Women were aptly named, and to woo man is their inborn prerogative."

"I'd go a long way to hear you address a hall full of suffragettes," laughed Ollie. "It certainly would be exciting, especially if the Pankhurst family and their following filled the front row."

"But you probably never will. I have about the same feeling toward strong-minded women that a boy has for an irate bumblebee." And so the subject was dropped.

It was nearly noon when they returned to the

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lake with almost as many lilies as a man could lift, and when the landing was reached, found the other fish-catchers still away. They filled two pans with the fragrant flowers for the big tent and table in front, after which Levi pitched the rest into the trout-pool, then began getting dinner. Ollie and Vance then betook themselves to this pool, he to recline upon its shaded bank, while she fed the fish.

"There are two things," she said, "that I'd like to have on our island. One is a small lily pond, the other a trout-pool just big enough for a dozen or so of these speckled fellows. I think I could sit and watch them for hours. And they have such expressive eyes, too. Do you notice how many of them keep watching us?"

"We could have one, I guess," she added musingly, "if I asked Uncle to fix it up. There is a spring on the island we pump water from; it's over on the west side in a little dingle and quite a rill runs away from it. It's open to the sun, so lilies would bloom, surely."

"But you would need two pools," Vance suggested; "trout won't thrive where there is a mud bottom, while lilies must have one. If Uncle Terry will dig and dam a small pool below the spring, I will supply the trout."

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"Oh, that will be nice, and I'll see the pool is made ready, anyway." Then she added naively, "How soon are you going to visit us again? You know Uncle said the latch-string was always out. And,"—hesitatingly,—“I know he will be glad to see you.”

"Will anybody else?"

"Why, of course we shall all be glad," flushing slightly.

"Will you?" persisted Vance.

"Yes, certainly," facing around and smiling half defiantly, "I am always glad to see my friends and I consider you one. Isn't that invitation enough?"

"It is, and I thank you. I shall hope to accept it within a month." He then outlined his plans of leaving the woods, together with a yachting trip to the Cape later on. "I shall remain in the city until my arm is in working order, and then take a needed vacation. I can afford it, I guess," he concluded, smiling. "Our mine has panned out beyond our wildest expectation."

"I congratulate you most sincerely, and"—archly,—“your green hoodoo is now banished for all time, I hope.”

"I have his one eye locked up, anyhow," laughed Vance, "and I am going to present it

to you for a keepsake. Its baleful blink resulted in my present fix, and almost cost me my life. Wasn't that hoodoo enough?"

"And you wish to shift it into my keeping."

"It is safest. Evil spirits have always been exorcised by beautiful women."

"There you go again," laughed Ollie. "Remember, I said by implication only."

"Can't you allow some leeway to a one-armed man? No charitable lady would trip up a cripple." And then both laughed, for they were beside the white-capped ocean in thought and feeling now.

To Vance especially did this summer-day longing now appeal. He had his heart's desire close by, not five feet away in fact, "and no one nigh to hinder."

He could watch her now, garbed in a jaunty blue outing-suit with broad collar and white four-in-hand tie. See her face in profile as she tossed bits of food to the trout and laughed like a child over their leaps. Now and then she would turn to him, with one of her saucy, half-defiant smiles, a picture of radiant girlhood, piquant, alluring, aggravating, captivating and always charming. For many long lonely months her face had been with him persistently. His endurance of his desolate camp life had been with her for an ultimate

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hope. His long waiting for letters, his jealousy, each grasped-at straw of hope and heart-longing, had all been for—Ollie. And now she was with him. Had come to him like an angel unaware. She had been with him all that bright morning on rippled lake or lily pond. She had been his, in fact, and yet just now a nook beside the white-capped ocean with her beside him would be Heaven, while here ——

And why? Simply because here he was forbidden by all rules of propriety and delicacy from any love declaration, while there he might give expression to the red tide of life now leaping through his pulses.

The zestful breezes of the wave-tossed ocean also called him. The upleaping spray, the green rockweed swaying and swinging and each billow's upshoot and foaming return, the white gulls overhead, the low, rumbling monotone far away, the louder crashes near by; each and all were whispering to Vance just now. Then, after a long interval of silence, his charmer, this invoking spirit, turned to him.

"Are you mooning?" she smilingly asked.

"Yes, and sunning also on your island for the moment. But I am back to Erin now, so tell me, what do you think of it?"

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"Oh, it's beautiful, more than that; a poem, rather," she answered, earnestly. "The lake is a dream of beauty, sequestered as it is. The mountain is an epic, almost, and seems so protecting, too. This morning when I looked out to see the sun rising over it, I felt like going to its brown side and patting that. But the best picture of all is your plot of greensward sloping upward to the white tents and brown cabins, with green mountain for a background. That view from the lake as I first saw it, with canoes on the sandy beach, is a picture well worth painting. Mr. Miner has a camera and will take a lot of pictures before we leave.

"Do you know," she added dreamily, "that I have many times to myself pictured what your camp was like? That I have imagined how you and the men were cooking, eating, and working, and how everything looked inside and outside the cabin? You described your life in tents vividly while road-cutting; snow-storms, tornadoes and all. But when you reached shelter, home, so to speak, you omitted all description of that. The 'Argus' keeps coming, but for two months not a single 'Wilderness Life' story has appeared. Why is it?"

"Laziness, maybe," replied Vance, "or I didn't

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need the money. At first I did, and twenty dollars a column seemed big. Now, and confidentially, with a quarter-million to divide, twenty per column seems like picking up pennies. Then I imagined the 'Argus' readers must have grown weary of my screeds. One hates to bore, even the public." Just then the Professor, Myra and Letty appeared, and so ended their privacy.

"Well," came from Myra later on, with questioning eyes when alone with Vance, "was the morning fair and wind south?"

"Both," smiling, "but I am only on the skirmish line here. Neither shall I cross it until I land on a certain island."

"And you are quite right to feel so, Vance. To do more than hint of love here would be poor taste. You must have been astonished to see her?"

"Astonished? I was dumfounded."

"Well, you wouldn't have been," Myra confided, in conclusion, "if the Miners hadn't assured her they would only halt for one night's camp here, then go on. As it is, she is placed in what you could easily make a most embarrassing position, so beware, and be dumb on one subject."

CHAPTER XXIX

A CYNIC once said that man's freedom begins with the cutting of apron-strings and ends with the tangling of bonnet-strings, though few realize it. To the eyes of five, now unconsciously observing this pretty "As You Like It" play in the wilderness, it soon became apparent that Vance, at least, was anxious to lose his freedom. And yet, as is always the case, no one apparently saw anything, at least not within the ken of the two interested ones. Both of these, however, were quite alert to that fact, and Vance wise enough to realize that neither here or now was the place or time for pairing off. He knew also that Ollie, keenly sensitive to propriety, would resent any move in that direction. But there is a disposition among most well-meaning people not exactly to push would-be lovers together, but to leave them to their own devices as much as possible. And so that afternoon when the Professor proposed that all visit the ridge where Vance found the peculiar crevasse, the question arose as to who should remain and keep him company.

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"Why, Ollie, of course," Mrs. Miner suggested with match-making intent. "I know she can best entertain him."

"It's very nice of you, Mrs. Miner, to think of me," Vance rejoined at once, "but I am sure Miss Ollie would like to see where I found my hoodoo. And as she must have had a surfeit of my company this morning, I prefer that you all go and forget me."

"Well, if you put it that way," Ollie answered instantly, "I shall remain here, anyhow." And she did.

"I am sorry you didn't go with the rest," Vance said to her later. "I want you to see all there is of the woods, to have something to think of afterward. A lot of memory-painting, you know."

"But isn't there enough right here? It isn't seeing something new every day I need. It is to absorb a few sights more thoroughly. That suits me best."

"Well, I suggest that we canoe around the lake this afternoon then. That will give you woodsy views galore, with almost a mile of primeval forest abutting the shore and quite free from undergrowth."

So charming was the view up this narrow lake, with a low forest-clad hill to right and around its

head, while to left opened a deep vista of tall spruce trees, that Ollie was quite content to watch the cloud-shadows cross the rippled water, a hawk sailing high above them, a blue heron that rose lazily from a thicket of reeds as they drew near, and two loons that hallooed from far up the lake. In fact, so absorbing was this sequestered sheet of water, so charming the ever-changing outlook, that she did not speak once for a long quarter-hour, while Vance, quite content also, smoked his cob pipe in silence.

"Do you know," she said at last, "that never in all my life did I see a lake so beautiful as this is? And its utterly shut-in isolation is its greatest charm. To see a house, a clearing, or even a strange canoe would spoil the view. I wouldn't mind if I saw one Indian, if I were sure he was a tame one, paddling alongside the shore in a bark canoe, or the smoke rising above a wigwam. But anything civilized, anything modern, would ruin the illusion."

"And so it would for me," coincided Vance. "And speaking of Indians, do you know the fact that not so very long ago hundreds of them lived and fished and hunted in this same wilderness has a certain pathos? This lake they called Umsaskis, or a broken bow, from its shape, was a favorite

haunt for them. We have in the cabin a dozen flint arrow-heads picked up on our garden spot or plot in front. And now all remaining of them are a few pitiful half-degenerates, fond of fire-water and living on a government reservation, with not a single real live one throughout this vast wilderness. A few of them work in lumber camps, or, clothed like tramps, fish, hunt, and trap in a shiftless manner. And even these will soon be only a memory."

"And so will this wilderness, if what Uncle says is true," responded Ollie in the same tone, then added cheerfully: "But retrospection is worse than useless and bygones are like country graveyards, best avoided. I am thankful I am living and here to-day."

Just then Levi whispered, "Look to the right, jest inside that lopped-over tree."

Both looked, and saw two deer, a buck and doe, watching them from a narrow opening. They stood motionless, while the canoe slowly drew near, until within two rods, then wheeled and bounded away.

"Primal wilderness all right, Ollie," Vance asserted, "and just what I hoped you would see. Deer are plenty and so tame we seldom go but a few rods into the woods when we need meat."

Three more were seen while they half circled the lake's head, also a mink just emerging from the water and dragging a trout as long as its body. Then they turned and followed the opposite shore back to the foot of the lake.

"This looking into the woods is the best of a canoe trip," Ollie declared, after a long interim, too interested to talk much. "It's all so new, and somehow I keep expecting to see a pair of big yellow eyes any moment. I wish I could, too, out here in the lake where I am safe."

"Did I write you about Pro and what he saw up the stump where we found our stolen gems?" Vance asked, now laughing at the recollection. "Well, after we had both been pawing over the muck stuff within the big hole for two hours, it occurred to him to look up. And there, not ten feet above, sat a big lynx glaring down! You ought to have seen that little man leap away and run. He didn't halt for bushes or bog-holes, either, until safe in our canoe. I didn't get over laughing for a week."

"And didn't you run, too?"

"No, not a step. I'd seen one or two of those chaps before, you see, but this was Pro's first offense." On the way back and near the landing, Vance pointed out a small bush-hidden stream en-

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tering the lake. "Up there a few rods," he announced, "was where our friend, Peg-leg, hid his canoe while he spied upon us and stole our bag of gems."

"And the lynx ate him finally," responded Ollie, smiling. "It was a well-deserved fate, I suppose."

"It was fortunate for us, anyhow."

A half-hour later, the sun well down, Ollie led the way up to the cabin. "I wish I could help you," she said, halting for Vance to catch up. "It hurts me to see a strong man like you limping."

"Well, I am glad I can even go slow just now," he rejoined cheerfully. "I might have been born with a hare-lip. My ankle will be all right in a week more. When I come to see you, I'll be able to dig clams. So you see I've much to hope for."

"And I shall anticipate your visit," she rejoined, much to the surprise of Vance, "so that I can see your arm free to use again. Uncle will want to feed you lobster three times a day, I guess, when I tell him what happened to you. But I shall be sorry when my outing here is over," she added half plaintively, "if all the days are like this, and as fair. It's been a dream, all of it, and so new."

When the big tent was reached, she stepped in-

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side for a handful of hardtack, then caught up with Vance and kept on to the trout-pool. "Here's supper for you, beautiful speckles," she said, tossing bits to them, and for a half-hour never even looked at Vance, so absorbed was she watching those restless trout.

"I begin to feel sorry for them," she admitted after that, "for they must know they are prisoners."

"Probably, but if they were not, you would miss watching them."

"And you men will kill and eat them later on?"

"I presume so. You enjoy them fried, don't you? I recall you wrote me the first taste of them still lingered with you."

"Yes, I did," smiling. "But I didn't see them killed first. Didn't hear the death-blow your guide gave those this morning."

"Is that any worse than to let them choke to death? The fact is," continued Vance bluntly, "almost every animal lives by killing, from microbes up to man, and our beautiful trout are the most voracious cannibals that swim. They swallow a big percentage of their own young."

"Have they any illusions, do you think?" smiling.

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"Very tangible ones, sometimes, when they see a baited hook just ahead."

"And the hook ends it, of course?"

"Yes, as that does most of our illusions."

"It is a cruel world we live in, after all," rejoined Ollie, sighing and tossing her last bit of cracker into the pool. "We all exist by killing. Our hopes are mostly fallacious. Our illusions either lead us into pitfalls or to disappointment. What is there cheerful in life, anyway?"

"Oh, countless things," reassured Vance. "You, for instance, are a cheerful factor in my life, besides keeping me guessing. Likewise hustling to follow your moods or combat your arguments. Life is just as we look at it, either a poem of beautiful things or a knell of tolling bells. Our illusions are a mixture of both with charm predominating. That is, if we try to see what is best and beautiful, while if we listen for tolling bells, we are sure to hear them. You are skeptical about illusions, Ollie," he continued, more seriously, "yet all in all, they are our best assets. Accepting them as was intended, we see more of joy than sorrow in life. Hear more birds sing, see more flowers, and sleep sweeter. But if we try to hear the sad bells, all we shall see ahead will be tombstones. I believe life was given to

be enjoyed while it lasts. If killing must be to live, then kill. By that you and I certainly keep well, happy, and enabled to enjoy all that is beautiful. What matter if we do find our illusions forever vanishing? New ones are continually arising to lure us onward to the final beacon light upon the Promised Land. That is why I say, let us try to see the flowers in our pathway and not the snakes and toads beneath them. Let us cull the best and sweetest ones we find and leave the thistles to the next fellow."

"But isn't that the acme of selfishness?"

"Well, yes and no. Why should you who find lilies choose thistles? Was life given you to make a martyr of yourself? I say no. Selfishness there must be, to obtain any happiness. For instance, I took you fishing this morning to enjoy your power over a wary trout, not to repine because he was killed that we might feast to-night. But you would persist in shuddering at his death-blow. You might as well have refused to pluck the lilies."

"Then it's a grab game in all ways, is it?"

"Why, yes, from picking flowers to mining tourmalines. And never forget that there are always Peg-legs in wait to grab first."

For a long moment Ollie watched the ever-rest-

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less trout, then glanced up at the lowering sun and back to the keen-eyed fish once more. "You are opening new horizons to me," she said finally, "and in one way adding a silver lining to the clouds for which I am grateful. I have always admired Longfellow's :

" ' Dust thou art to dust returneth
Was not spoken of the soul,'

very much. Now I feel more of its cheering message."

" And there is another of his thoughts we should consider well. We are, as we follow the highway of life, sure to hear

" ' Muffled drums still beating
Funeral marches to the grave.'

But so long as they are not ahead of us, it is folly to listen. We would much better try to hear the birds singing along the hedgerows. To give is more blessed than to receive, I admit. To bear one another's burdens is godlike. But beyond that, selfishness is also needful, or we lose the power to aid others. To lighten their burden of gloom. Philanthropy is noble, charity is beautiful, but a man dead broke is useless in either the rôle of philanthropist or charity-worker."

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"You have said I was too sensitive to pain-giving," Ollie said. "Too soft-hearted in fact, and perhaps I am. But please recollect that I practically began life as a town charge. Feeling thus has been my salvation, and to win friends by unselfish thought has been my only hope of obtaining them."

"But, my dear girl," said Vance, assuringly, "nature was kinder to you than Fate, for you are dowered with attributes that inevitably win friends, loyal ones, too, and keep them. Besides, you are the picture of health, for all of which you ought to be thankful."

"I am always, only I wish I weren't so sensitive, so foolishly soft-hearted, as I suppose you think."

"Why, yes, in a way, for it spoils so much that you might enjoy. You will persist in hearing the muffled drums upon some other highway. You feel that you must leave your own primrose-bordered path and follow that sad procession. As for your own pitiful recollections, why, living over bygones is worse than useless, and to quote your favorite author again,

" ' Let the dead past bury its dead. ' "

Ollie smiled again, for somehow this strong man's cheerful optimism was like ocean winds.

"We are all in the same boat," he continued buoyantly. "All traveling the same highway, all forced to hear the same sad funeral marches upon another avenue. They are a part of life, in fact, and if they did not eventuate, there would soon be no room for the arriving generations. So I say let us live one day at a time and that within our own circle of friends."

"You are like a tonic," she answered, with a smile, "and I shall in future try to live and feel as you do, within my own orbit."

Just now Vance felt more assured he was well within that charmed circle. "She is less combative," he thought, "less disposed to convince me that I am wrong, and more inclined toward my own outlook." He continued the same reflections after they parted, he to enjoy a pipe upon his rude couch; she to join the returning ladies in their own tent. "I am sorry I mentioned the word 'pauper,'" he said to himself, "for it brought an appealing look that was pathetic. It seemed like an upraised hand to ward off a blow. I ought to have thought before I spoke. A man should always be careful when a confiding girl is listening. And one with her past and present position has every reason to feel as if upon thin ice. I only wish the propriety wall didn't inter-

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vene. I'd chance a 'Will you?' the first available opportunity. But I absolutely must respect that."

The most impassable barrier between them, her devotion to Uncle Terry, once again recurred to Vance. It came with more pertinence, since he had obtained a clearer insight into her soul, as it were, and realized under how much obligation she felt to her foster-father.

"It is beautiful, too," he thought, "and perfectly natural for a girl of her heroic unselfishness. And for ample reason, also." And then a "Yes" to his intended "Will you?" seemed much more improbable. In fact, a "No, not so long as Uncle Terry needs me," appeared almost inevitable. He was in good spirits, however. She was here where he could see her most of the time, to be wooed in treatment if not by words, and for a long, charming two weeks. Compared to the many past months of persistent heart-hunger with wide-apart and brief letters, they seemed like an Elysium to him. Neither did the probably qualified refusal appear disheartening so long as the hope of winning her some day was left him. He felt himself just out of boyhood with many long years ahead. A possible "Yes" in due time was still a joyous beacon-light, shining afar, and so

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charming now that Vance felt as if he had heard angel's wings rustling, or held the key to Love's Garden.

He was as hilarious a little later when all gathered around the camp table to enjoy the broiled salmon Ollie had caught, whereat Myra, discovering that, felt called upon to enjoy a little badinage. "Well," she said, first smiling at Ollie, then glancing at Vance, "how have you two good people passed the afternoon?"

"Oh, canoeing around the lake, discussing suffragettes, Longfellow's 'Psalm of Life,' muffled drums, and the cannibal habits of trout. Guess I've done most of the talking, however. It's a weakness of mine, like most men when they have a charming listener."

"And did you charm yours?"

"I hope so, but probably bored her. She was too polite to say so, however."

"Well, most ladies have to be," rejoined Myra in the same tone of pleasantry. "It's the only way we can keep you men happy and attentive; let you do all the talking. I have observed that most men almost insist upon doing so, and get grouchy if they can't."

"Yes, I guess we want to do most of the bating," admitted Vance, "but I didn't to-day. Miss

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Ollie took her innings with her usual vim, besides catching me between bases now and then."

"And how have you spent the afternoon?" Vance asked after a pause. "Did you visit our cleft in the ridge?"

"Yes, and made a discovery," Myra answered, glancing at the Professor. "Not cannibal footprints in the sand, but moccasined ones in the fir-needle carpet. Some one visited your ledges this forenoon, so Pip said, and he wore moccasins."

"Looked like an Indian's footprints to me, from the size," interjected the Professor, "and I guess Levi would better go over there early in the morning and look at them. It isn't pleasant to feel we have a poacher around. The boy said the gravel in the pocket had been recently disturbed, and it's been three days since your men were there."

"I doubt if he found anything, however," answered Vance. "Douglas said they had skinned the pocket thoroughly. Probably it was some wandering trapper looking around for a good location this fall, and harmless as a muskrat. He might be quite interesting to meet, also; they usually are." All of which was said mainly to quiet the minds of his visitors. Later on Vance privately questioned his boy, Pip.

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"I find ze track, one big man track, an' he come from north," Pip explained. "An' I follow him more half mile. He dig in ze hole, too, so soon dis forenoon, dig a lot, too."

"Indian, do you guess?"

"No Injun, I know. Too big man. Him foot go deep in moss."

"Well, what do you think, Levi?" Vance next questioned. "Do you know of any 'big Injun' apt to come prowling around our premises, or was it some skulking trapper?"

"I dunno," that sage woodsman answered, shaking his head. "Thar ain't no real Injuns near'n the Micmac reservation at the mouth o' Restigouche in New Brunswick, all o' three hundred miles away. Thar's a few from Oldtown, who come in lumberin' in the fall, but they're back thar now."

"Well, how about trappers? What are their habits?"

"Oh, they come in 'long in October, mostly in pairs, 'n' white men or half-breeds. They generally go to the same lake or stream year after year, too."

"Any ever try this lake? We didn't see any last winter."

"No, not the upper end. No swamp, ye see.

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Thar used to be a couple on 'em, two half-breeds, cousins, by the name o' Tomah, that trapped up on Misery Pond a few seasons ago, but gin it up, I heard."

"Then no trapper would be here in June?"

"No; all a waste o' time. None on 'em ever come in till the last o' September, anyway. Then they locate 'longside o' some lake or pond, build a shack, cut a lot o' wood, then start riggin' a line o' deadfalls round swamps to hev 'em ready 'fore snow-come. O' course, they hev steel traps, too, fer mus'rats, mink, 'n' fisher, but the season don't open till November."

"I think you would better go over to the ridge early in the morning, Levi," Vance concluded, "and take a look at those tracks. Also, you and Pip must keep quiet about this matter, or it will spoil my friends' visit."

No mention of it was made by Vance, either, when he joined them around the open camp-fire later on. But it annoyed him for all that. He thought more about it after Levi had, as usual, helped him undress and given his ankle the customary rubbing. Not so much on account of any pilfering this prowler might do, at night, but mainly because right here in the cabin were four bags of tourmalines worth a fair-sized fortune. Of

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course they were locked in his trunk ; he never left the cabin unlocked, either, but Peg-leg's raid had made Vance both wary and timid.

Furthermore, a strange prowler lurking around in the wilderness was suspicious.

Just now, also, when he tried to sleep he could not. He heard as usual the loon's call, the two owls hooting, with an occasional "Yaooul" from far away, but they were of scant interest now. Only that somewhere not far off, an unknown human being, who might be a thief, was perhaps waiting to rob him. He knew, too, that his rich mine discovery was known throughout the State, realized that some outlaw, several of them in fact, might plot, plan, and lie in wait to raid his cabin when an opportune moment came. Planning what to do, and how to safeguard his fortune made him more wakeful than ever. After considering carefully, he woke Levi. "Do you know," he said to him, "that I am so worried over those tracks and what they may mean to me, I can't sleep. To be robbed again after all the money I've spent spells ruin for me. If my friends were not here, I'd take you and John and start out with those four bags early in the morning, ankle or no ankle. Neither do I dare leave the cabin again, even with you or John on guard. Two or three desperadoes might

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sneak around to work the hold-up game like highwaymen. What do you say?"

"Wal, I don't like them tracks," Levi whispered, as if a robber might be just outside, "but I dunno what to say.

"How'd it do to go 'n' hide 'em to-night?" he suggested after a few moments' thought.

"But where?"

"Wal, how'd it do to sink 'em in the brook out o' the lily pond? The moon'll be up now in 'bout an hour, 'n' by that time we kin be up into the brook 'thout nobody seein' whar we go."

"We'll do it," asserted Vance, so anxious that he nearly forgot his sprained ankle, and soon the four bags were made ready by the light of one camp candle. Vance also noticed that Levi sharpened four small sticks, tying one to each bag, and then Vance, dressed again, hobbled after Levi. And now he observed a truly Indian-like sortie, for that astute guide first looked and listened from the cabin porch, next, and keeping in shadow, crept cautiously down to the lake-shore, then along that, and crouching low thus reached his canoe. Here, with Vance flat on his back within it, Levi listened long again, pushed off, and, keeping close to shore, slowly paddled down the lake then up the alder-canopied stream

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to halt half-way to the pond. Then Vance, rising, wondered how Levi ever pushed his canoe up that stream, for no passage was visible. It was an uncanny spot, for dozens of frogs kept up a discordant concert. Now and then a muskrat splashed into the water from somewhere, while Vance kept fancying that he could hear snakes crawling in the bushes. For a half-hour those two sat silent but ever watching and listening, then came a faint light from eastward and soon the brook's course was outlined. To push his canoe's stern into the overhanging alders, drop a bag of gems into the black water, thrust its attached stick into the bank below the water line, next break an alder branch to mark the spot, now followed; and so the four bags were hidden.

Vance, ever watching and listening, while Levi paddled noiselessly back, always within the shadows along the bank, felt as if ghosts were abroad.

CHAPTER XXX

L EVI was just starting a fire when Vance awoke late the next morning. "Wal," he said, after the usual "Good-mornings," "I've ben out takin' a look at them tracks, 'n' they ain't no Injun's, but made by a fat man with short legs."

"And how could you tell?" queried Vance, astonished.

"Wal, in the fust place an Injun allus toes in, 'sides takin' longer steps 'n a white man o' the same build. I callate this man weighed over two hundred, with short legs. He war up on the mountain, too, yesterday, 'n' down back o' here jest in the edge o' the woods 'tween us 'n' the ice-house. I callate that war arter dark, though, 'cause you war out by the trout-pool till 'most sundown. Come out, 'n' I'll show ye." Vance dressed hastily and followed Levi out to the rear of the cabin. And there, sure enough, just back of a big spruce, a moccasin-shod man had left a dozen footprints.

"He stood here 'n' peeked," Levi asserted,

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while Vance stared down at the footprints outlined deep in the moss and needle carpet. "He went 'round the ice-house, too," continued Levi, "'n' he war up top o' the mountain, ez I said. Seems to me he looked us all over 'n' didn't care a cuss if we found his tracks."

It appeared that way to Vance, also, with the added wonder of how this man, thus spying upon the camp, could have remained unseen with so many moving about. First, the Professor with three others, and Pip to act as guide, had passed the forenoon on the mountain. All the visitors except Ollie had been over to the ridge in the afternoon, and how this man could have spied about as he did without discovery was a problem. "He might have come here after dark," suggested Vance, following the moccasin trail around the ice-house, "but he must have visited the ridge in the forenoon and mountain in the afternoon to have escaped being seen.

"One thing we must do," he cautioned, as the two returned to the cabin, "and that is keep quiet about this fellow's inspection, or it will spoil my friends' outing. Once they know that we are spied upon, their enjoyment will vanish. You must tell the rest of the guides to keep mum about what Pip found. I have passed that off as

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a trifle, but what you have discovered is more serious and we will keep still about it. Especially our hiding those bags in the brook."

Vance had planned a trip to Misery Pond that day, also an outdoor dinner in wilderness manner, and soon after breakfast the necessary preparations were made, cooking utensils, provisions, boards for a table, and a few other necessary articles were packed in Levi's big canoe, and after Vance had requested Douglas to take a forenoon and afternoon stroll around the mountain, while Pip remained in camp, the party was ready to start. "Levi and I will push ahead to make ready for dinner," Vance explained to John, "while you can pilot the rest. No need to hurry," he added; "we shall paddle the eight miles in two hours, but if you get there by noon, it's soon enough," and away they went for a charming day's outing.

"Where do you imagine our fat spy camped last night?" Vance asked, after he and Levi were well ahead of the other four canoes.

"Wal, up on Ironstone Brook, I callate. Ye see that comes from round back o' the mountain, jines Misery stream jest above whar it enters the Cant-hook, 'n' ez he come from north that seems likely."

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“And how did he come, do you think?”

“Why, up the Cant-hook, o’ course. He had to, if he come by canoe. And he must, fer it’s over forty miles to any other stream. A middlin’ long tramp, even to an Injun, ’n’ he wa’n’t one.”

“How long would it take us to go up this brook to where he would naturally camp?” came next from Vance, anxious to spy upon the spying one.

“Wal, an hour, ’n’ mebbe more. It’s a crooked stream with long shallow spots ye hev to wade ’n’ drag a canoe over. We wouldn’t hev time this forenoon.” For a full half-hour now Levi paddled steadily onward, while Vance watched ahead, smoked, and kept thinking. He couldn’t quite obtain a line on what this unseen man was after. He had spied upon them boldly, not quite like a thief, yet keeping under cover as one inevitably would. He had walked around their ice-house, might have purloined a ham, some birds, or a string of trout; yet had not done so, while his digging over the tourmaline pocket was no more than any wandering hunter might do. All in all, it was mysterious.

“What was he after anyhow?” Vance queried after a long interim, and just as they headed up the Misery stream. “He might have swiped

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grub enough for two weeks out of our ice-house, but didn't. If it was to catch us all away and search the cabin, he certainly wouldn't have left so many telltale tracks. Now what was he after?"

"Danged if I can understand it, either," admitted Levi. "It's all queer to me. If he'd ben honest, he'd sartinly called right off 'n' said 'Howdy,' or waited till somebody showed up. We war all thar till eight o'clock. Douglas war thar, or in the new cabin, all day. You war out by the trout-pool two hours, 'n' yit he kept shady. It looks crooked, anyhow."

Just then, after passing the mouth of Iron-stone Brook, Levi halted the canoe one long moment, peered into the undergrowth to the right, then pushed ashore at the entrance to a slight path.

"Thar's whar a canoe war pulled out not long ago," he asserted, stepping out and pointing to crushed sedge-grass. "'N' 'twar done by the same fat man," he added, stooping to examine a track. "Guess I'll take a look up back." And Vance, as curious, crawled out and followed him.

Two rods back from the stream and upon a bit of upland, they next came upon the night camping-spot of this man. Little was left to show it. A few black embers, a narrow bed of fir twigs, a bent-over wambeck above the ashes, with a few

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bushes cut away, were all to prove that some wilderness wanderer had cooked and slept in simple manner.

"He war used to the woods," Levi next explained, from some occult signs only he could see. "But 'twar two, 'n' mebbe three days since he war here," he added, bending over to look at something.

"And how can you tell?" Vance queried.

"Wal, grass he trod on hez straightened up, 'n' birds hev eat up every crumb that's allus left."

This discovery was only of passing interest, however, though proving that this mysterious spy had come up the Cant-hook, been looking around not far from their camp for two or three days, at a season when no hunter or trapper ever visited the woods, and might still be waiting for some sinister purpose.

"Hang him ; he's like a pebble in your shoe, Levi," Vance declared, when once more on their way up the stream. "How would it do for you to play the spy act to-morrow and take a trip up this brook you think he must be camped on?"

"I'm willin', o' course, but if I ketch him in camp, which ain't likely, I really hain't much to say to him. I've thought o' suthin' else," Levi continued after a long pause, "'n' that is I think

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he'd 'a' swiped suthin' out o' our ice-house if he hadn't got skeered away. He walked 'round it, I callate, heard some on us talkin', stood watchin' 'n' listenin' quite a spell, then, gittin' frightened, sneaked away. Ez near ez I kin guess, he war thar early this mornin'."

"And so were you."

"O' course ; but he might 'a' ben ahead o' me. Mebbe he spied me 'way off through the woods, lookin' down fer tracks."

"Well, what do you advise ?"

"Why—I—I guess we'd better set a trap fer him," Levi rejoined hesitatingly. "In the fust place, he'll figger we must hev stores in the ice-house, 'n' good things, too. He won't hev much but pork 'n' hardtack, 'n', wal, he's most sartin to look into our ice-house the fust chance."

"But we can lock it."

"Sartin; but that won't find out who he is."

"And how will you trap him?" continued Vance, to whom that intention appeared astonishing.

"Oh, easy," returned Levi. "Jest rig a fish-line up through the trees from our cabin to the ice-house door ; John 'n' I'll watch thar, 'n' by the time he's crawled up into the ice-house or ready to come out again, he'll be lookin' into the muzzle

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o' two pistols." And Vance laughed heartily at that possible dénouement.

"Thar's 'nother thing I've figgered out," continued Levi, "'n' that is his findin' us here must 'a' ben a s'prise-party to him, or else he wouldn't 'a' left tracks so plain 'n' plenty. It's that, or he don't care a cuss either way."

"Well, trap him then," advised Vance, laughing again, for the spectacle of this fat thief backing feet foremost out of their ice-house only to look into the muzzle of two revolvers was ludicrous.

"And suppose you do so nab him ; what then ?" he next questioned.

"Wal, that'll be fer you to say," chuckled Levi, now also seeing the funny side of this outcome, and then Vance began to hope that Levi's plan might work out successfully.

Misery Pond, reached after an hour's devious course up that winding, sedge-bordered stream, proved to be a most picturesque lakelet in the eyes of Vance. To the right, and northward, as they entered it, opened a vast area of level marsh without trees or high bush rising from it, yet abloom with purple heather as far as eye could see. It was like looking across an expanse, a mile in width and many in length, of those bright flowers almost as level as the lake surface. From

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far away, also, or bordering this flowered plain, hundreds of dead spruce or hackmatack trees of small size arose like so many skeletons. A grim warning, almost, while close by and half circling the lake on the side they entered was a fringing border of green lily-pads white-dotted in the sunlight. To the left, on the south and west, a thick growth of tall timber sloped upward, with little or no undergrowth. Toward this Levi now headed while Vance gazed wonderingly out across the unending vista of purple flowers, a new sight to him.

"Some few flowers," he asserted, nodding toward this purple vista after he had crawled out of their canoe.

"A few," admitted Levi, drawing the canoe well out.

"And how far do they reach?"

"Oh, a matter o' ten miles or so. Quite a purty sight, ain't they?"

"And what killed all those trees?" came next from the astonished one.

"Oh, a sorter black worm, borin' into their roots, I've ben told. They've stood thar lookin' jest the same ever sence I fust come here, 'n' that's thirty years ago, or more." This brought a new phase of wildwood tree life and death to Vance, and that vast expanse of level flowers and dead

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trees became a sort of forest Golgotha. He could not keep his eyes away from it, but watched it, fascinated, while Levi made haste to set the table, cut short logs to lay crossways for broiling and frying purposes, and a pile of dry wood to use later. Soon the four other canoes appeared in single file to halt among the lily-pads, while bared hands and white arms reached out to pick the thick-growing blossoms. A pretty picture those grey and green canoes made with white-gowned women in them, each holding aloft a bright-colored parasol. Best of all to Vance, watching, was Ollie with her glowing red one. A few moments only did they linger, then turned and crossed the lake to where he sat. A chorus of delighted exclamations came next as they landed.

"Oh, I never saw anything so beautiful as that purple expanse of flowers stretching out for miles!" was Ollie's tribute to it.

"And such a gem of a lake, too," came from Myra, "with its sparkling ripples and lily-pad border. But that sea of purple flowers almost awes me. And our guide said it was over ten miles long, and half that wide."

"It is awe-inspiring," rejoined Vance, "and as new to me as to you, Myra. I am glad I thought to come here."

"I almost wish those dead trees didn't loom up in the distance," declared Ollie, studying them. "They seem like so many skeletons to me."

"Yes," said Vance, "if you want to think of whitened bones, they do. But why not see the miles and miles of purple flowers nearer to us? Those 'muffled drums' are not on our highway." And then their eyes met, while Ollie's held a merry twinkle.

"Your recollection of my vagaries is like what some one said falling over a wheelbarrow meant," she answered, "because it takes so long to get untangled."

"On second thought," she continued, glancing over the lake again, "I rather think those dead trees improve the flowers by contrast. And dry trees are only good kindling-wood, after all. Yes, I think they do add to the view, don't you, Myra?"

"I certainly do," Myra declared, "but then, I always try to see the bright and beautiful side of everything. I am sure it is best to do so."

"And so do I, lately," rejoined Ollie. "That is, ever since I first came into the wilderness. I think its vastness and beauty have made all human troubles seem but trifles after all."

"They do, and I hope you will stick to your change of heart," said Myra. "You certainly have so much to be thankful for and so little to

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grieve over, it seems a sin for you ever to have a blue mood."

"That's right, Myra, and just what I told her yesterday," agreed Vance. "I even quoted her own favorite poet to prove it, too."

"But I am going to try to be good now," answered Ollie, laughingly, and glancing at Vance. "I am never going to hear another muffled drum as long as I live. And if ever I see you fall over a wheelbarrow, Mr. Preacher, I am going to laugh fit to split, while you feel of your hurts."

But the odor of broiling venison and boiling coffee now put an end to all such badinage and spurred all the ladies on to begin setting the table. A pretty one it soon became, for Vance had brought a white spread and napkins, Ollie broke lily blossoms from their stems to scatter over it, and soon its long and wide expanse much resembled a banquet board.

"Not just like the one you first described in your 'Wilderness Life' stories, Mr. Harper," Ollie now asserted, surveying it with a smile. "And do you know, I think that unless one is starving, he needs pretty dishes and napery to make food taste good. I do, anyway."

"Certainly," admitted Vance, "and so do I. But circumstances alter appetites, and a twelve-

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hours' wait for a square meal would make fried pork eaten from a tin plate taste like food for the gods to even you, my dear girl."

The grilled venison and well-browned trout soon brought keen enjoyment to her, however, as to all that merry party, for it was now one in the afternoon and the outdoor air and romantic surroundings added a zest beyond the pretty table. A picture of the table and party, with guides reclining near the crossed-log fire in the background, was next taken by Mr. Miner, after which he and the Professor tried fly-casting in the lake.

The guides next ate their own well-earned meal, washed and packed the dishes, after which all were paddled around this sequestered lakelet, oft halting to pluck unusually big lilies.

"I can't see why this was called Misery Pond," Ollie said to John, who had been detailed by Vance to convoy her and Letty, after she had taken a long parting look around it before entering the sedge-bordered stream leading out.

"It war by one trapper called so long 'go, Missis," John answered. "Him got hand caught in otter trap with teeth in winter, an' mos' die. It ver' poor name, too."

But something else of more pertinent interest was now confronting Vance, a prospective storm.

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For over two weeks, or since his accident, each day had been a June gem. But an ominous ring now encircled the sun. A mackerel sky was spreading from southward, and as he and Levi, ahead of the rest, entered the Cant-hook lake, its pair of loons were hallooing loudly.

"Thar's a storm brewin'," Levi asserted, glancing up at the lowering sun, then to eastward, where a bank of black clouds was rising. "'N' it'll start with a thunder-shower, I callate."

It seemed so to Vance, who saw that preparations to meet it must be taken at once. Also that his guests had best abandon their tents until fair weather returned. "We must give up our cabin to the ladies, Levi," he answered, "and the sooner we go about it the better." Just then he felt the need of his arm more than ever. His ankle, however, was now in service again, and when Douglas and the boy met them at the landing, the shifting-over plan was started on at once. To move their own belongings across to the new cabin was an easy matter and soon accomplished, and when the rest of the party arrived, Vance was at the landing to meet them. "There's a storm coming, good people," he said, "and I think you ladies would better occupy our cabin, until fair weather returns. We men will sleep in the new cabin."

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All began to aid in the removal. The bough beds from two tents were carried by armfuls and spread upon the floor of Vance's room. The canvas cover over the outdoor table was laid over them, the couch on the cabin piazza was taken in, and within a half-hour the walls of his alcove room were practically hidden by feminine apparel and his one small table covered with toilet articles. "You'll be a little cramped, ladies," Vance announced, smiling at them, "but it's better than tenting through a rain-storm. Here, you will at least be dry, with an open fire to console you."

At Levi's suggestion, the small tent was next taken down to be set up close to the cabin, and the outdoor table placed within it, and when the sun vanished behind a low bank of black cloud, the prospective storm was prepared for.

Levi next rigged his signal-line between the ice-house and new cabin, while John and the rest of the men were cutting, splitting, and carrying in an ample supply of fire-wood, and by the time darkness enclosed this wildwood camp, Levi and Pip were cooking supper over the open fire, while four ladies watched them with keen interest. It was now inky black outside, with rumbling thunder drawing nearer, and faint flashes of lightning adding interest. A cold wind next swept around

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the mountain, and by the time the party had gathered about the tent-covered table lit by two candles, the tall timber just back of the cabin was moaning and creaking in the rising gale.

"Oh, this is just grand!" Ollie exclaimed, as the tent shook and a more vivid flash came. "And to feel we have a secure cabin so handy makes me defiant."

"Like a woodchuck peeping out of his burrow, eh?" remarked Mr. Miner, knowing the habits of that little animal.

"Well, we won't have a tent blown from over us," added Myra, who had been thinking what a night storm might do.

The meal was scarce finished, however, when this one broke with all the fury a wilderness storm is capable of. The lightning flashed and thunder crashed almost incessantly. The loud on-rolling thunder echoed from mountain to wooded hill across the lake and back like distant cannon. The tall trees bent with creaking and groaning protest close by, and then the rain came in wind-swept torrents, a wild, tumultuous tornado.

"Log walls and a roof seem good to me just now," Myra asserted after all had retreated to the cabin.

"But it's glorious just the same," responded

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Ollie, "for I must say I love a storm. I only wish I could look out now and see the trees bending before it and branches flying away."

"It will soon blow over," declared Vance, "and meantime we are secure." He added fresh fuel to the fire. "But we may be kept prisoners for a day or two," he continued regretfully, "and that will be dull music for you all. Just sit around, watch for clearing signs, eat, watch some more, and so on all day. A backwoods outing needs sunshine, or it's all off."

"But we can talk," asserted the Professor, smiling.

"Or you could lecture on volcanic action and the origin of tourmalines," suggested Myra, knowing his hobby.

But Vance paid scant heed to these exchanges, for two things vexed him. First, this mysterious spy, and next, this inopportune storm that might last several days. He felt himself the host, who must entertain his visitors, but how to do so during a prolonged rain was a problem. He had planned several more outings, one to visit and inspect a blow-down not far from the head of the long rapids, another to a beaver-dam on a small stream entering the lake below them on the left side, and a canoe trip up Ironstone Brook to a

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ledge and mineral spring that gave it its name. There was yet time for all of them, but fair weather was imperative, and it would be dull waiting for it. Then there was that unknown intruder! Just now Vance began wondering where he was and how sheltered. He rather hoped he hadn't any shelter except an overturned canoe. Who was he, anyhow? What was he spying around their camp for? Levi had said he must be a white man, and possibly surprised at coming upon their camp. But if so, and honest, he certainly would have made himself known. All and all, it was a vexatious problem, and more exasperating because Vance dare not confide it to any of his friends, not even the Professor, who had been his mentor in all things for many years.

That annoyance followed him after a lull in the storm came, and continued when he with the two other men went to the new cabin to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXI

IT was still raining when Vance woke at daylight to sit up and look at nine men rolled in blankets around him, and all asleep. He next felt of his broken arm which was aching again because of poor sleep and dampness ; then lay down once more. A few birds started faint song calls, the two loons hallooed dismally, while the rain kept pattering on the cabin roof. "We are in for a long, dull, wet day," thought Vance now sitting up again. Then he carefully woke Levi.

"Let's go over to the ice-house," he whispered, "and see what's happened. Besides, we shall need venison for breakfast. It will have to be cooked here this time, so as not to disturb the ladies."

But nothing had happened at the ice-house, for after Levi had untied the fish-line so as not to disturb the two tin cups tied to the other end, everything was found as they had left it.

"Have you told the other guides about our caller?" Vance queried after Levi had passed

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out a ham, a pail of eggs, and quarter of venison.

"Wal, I had to," he rejoined, "fer they saw my signal things. But they'll keep mum, o' course."

"Do you think he will come around to-night?" Vance next asked.

"Wal, mebbe; 'cordin' to how the weather is. 'N' mebbe he won't show up at all. I've thought he might be some timber-buyer jest prospectin'."

"But if so, he certainly would have made himself known."

"He'd orter, if he wa'n't a thief," Levi answered vaguely, and then the two returned to the cabin to waken the rest and begin breakfast-getting. It was more than an hour before it was ready, for plates and dishes had to be brought from the tent table to be washed. Cooking was slow over the small camp-stove, and the ladies were up and dressed long before the fried venison, coffee, and flapjacks were ready.

Meantime the rain kept falling in a dismal drizzle.

A little interesting information was brought to Vance by Levi immediately after breakfast.

"I took a sneak up top o' the mountain," he said when the chance came, "'n' saw smoke risin'

'bout whar an ironstun ledge is 'longside that brook. Somebody's campin' thar," he added significantly, "'n' mebbe somebody'll kinder want to peek into our ice-house to-night."

"I hope so," rejoined Vance, rather glad, "and we shall be ready for that somebody, eh, Levi?"

"Two on us will, middlin' soon," he answered, chuckling. "I'd jest injie pintin' a pistol at a measly sneak-thief, backin' feet-first out o' our ice-house."

That day, as might be expected, seemed interminable to Vance. Fitful showers kept falling. The ladies were prisoners in their cabin, while he and his two men visitors kept the fire going, smoked, and sat around in glum disgust. The midday meal was more of a success, however, as Levi used the open fire and added biscuit browned in their tin baker, a culinary act quite new and interesting to their feminine observers. The rain ceased by mid-afternoon, and then, out of sheer desperation, the Professor and Mr. Miner proposed to go fishing. "I'll join you," declared Vance, as much bored as they, "if only to look on."

A goodly string of trout rewarded them, which were served for supper, after which Vance con-

sulted Levi. "Well," he said, "when do you expect our fat prowler?"

"'Bout daybreak, I callate. He won't come to-night; too dark. We are all ready fer him, 'n' 'twon't be two minutes arter the tin cups jingle 'fore we are thar."

Any unusual or nerve-thrilling episode in prospect is a sleep-destroyer, and so was this to Vance and his two men that night, who remained dressed. Vance slept least of all. First, the scare he had received three nights previous, resulting in hiding a fortune in gems, was yet with him. From that moment, this mysterious prowler had been a persistent annoyance, always in mind, and, try as he might, there was no escaping it. Vance did not fear him with his two well-armed guards and a big pistol always in his own pocket, and yet the mystery of it all, there in a wilderness, mysterious in itself, was exasperating. Like an expected ghost, almost, or a forewarned burglar. So that night was one of fitful sleep and dreams to Vance, with jingling cups seeming half to waken him. He was fully awake long before daylight, and Levi as well.

Just as the first faint light of dawn came, the two cups dependent from the fish-line above Levi's head gave the long-awaited-for jingle!

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In an instant Levi and John sprang up, and like two moccasin-shod specters darted out through the dim forest. Vance, following as fast as his ankle permitted, saw the ice-house door open, then halted behind a big tree just as his two scouts crept up to crouch on either side of the ice-house door. A moment only did they thus wait, then out pitched a ham, next a string of partridges, and a moment after two big feet appeared out of the small breast-high door, and a stout man slid downward with one arm clasped around a box of eggs!

As he faced around, he saw two ominous pistols pointed at him.

"Up with your hands quick!" shouted Levi.

"'N' damn quick, too," added John. So scared was this thief that the box of eggs fell to the ground, and up went both hands.

Vance, springing forward, saw Job Ross!

For one instant he glanced at the three stern-faced men, then, "Wal, what ye want?" came in husky voice.

"Oh, just a trifle to square up matters, Mr. Ross," Vance answered loftily. "I'll call it an even three hundred."

"But I hain't no money with me, an' this is robbery," Ross growled.

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"You've named it," responded Vance, grinning facetiously, "and it's three hundred to settle the bill. Your note for thirty days will do, if you haven't the cash, however. Pick up that ham and the birds," he added sternly, "and come down to camp." Thus cowed, Ross did so and ignominiously marched on ahead of the three suggestive pistols. He protested no more, conscious that it was useless, and when the new cabin was reached, he meekly entered it, still carrying the stolen ham and birds.

"You can drop your loot, but hold up your hands," Vance next commanded. "Now search him, Levi," he added, and Levi did so, but no weapon was found.

"Do you know this man, Levi?" came next from Vance.

"Yes, it's Job Ross," Levi answered.

"And you, John," turning to him. "Do you recognize this man?"

"Him Job Ross. I work for him one winter," John grinned.

"All right then, so you both can swear to his identity if need be. Well, Mr. Ross, the richest man in Fort Kent," continued Vance with fine sarcasm, "borrowed a trifle of three hundred dollars from me last fall, and came here this morning

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to pay it. Also being short of grub, to buy a ham if he could. But in his haste he forgot the money so is going to give his note instead."

"You pay this debt of your own free will, Mr. Ross, do you not?" Vance next queried as the Professor, "catching on," produced a note-book and fountain-pen and filled out a note for three hundred dollars upon a leaf from it.

"No, I don't," growled Ross, "but I'll sign it."

"Well, say you do right now before these witnesses," demanded Vance, "or take the consequences."

A grunted, "Wal, then I do," came from him.

"Now, Mr. Ross," continued Vance sarcastically, "we are all pleased to have you call so early, for we were expecting you. You can take the ham you have selected, and if you hurry back, you can have breakfast as soon as we do." And the now ashamed Ross sneaked away.

But Levi kept him company as far as the ice-house, and later on a lock was placed on the door.

"I can't understand why that man played the thief," Vance said when all were once more together. "He is rich enough to pay any price for anything."

"It's the nater o' the brute," Levi answered

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contemptuously. "I know him. He jest callated it war a cute trick to sneak 'round ez he did 'n' swipe some stuff."

"But won't he revenge himself?" queried the Professor, anxiously. "Sneak back some night and set fire to our cabin, maybe?"

"No, I hardly think so," Vance answered. "He has some pride I guess, even if he is a brute, and when he cools off will be glad he got out of the scrape so easily. He will be back at the Mills by night."

Vance measured him rightly, for Ross did make haste to get away, and troubled them no more.

By this time the sun shone cheerfully and by the middle of the afternoon the camp was dry and the small tent and table back in their original positions.

Four days more were spent in wilderness sight-seeing, the blow-down and beaver-dam were visited, dinner cooked in the woods, and on the fourth day a trip up Ironstone Brook was taken. This proved a unique one to the women, for the stream wound its devious way through swamps and stretches of forest, with now and then a few rods so shallow that all men had to wade, while the canoes were dragged over them. By noon an abutting cliff of Ironstone was reached, at the foot of which a spring of rust-colored water oozed

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away. Just beyond this, upon a bit of open upland, stood a bent-over bark and sapling shed, perhaps six feet long and open on one side, with the usual crossed logs of a backwoods fire in front of it, though now nearly burned away. A bed of recently cut fir-twigs lay within the bark shed, and two bent-over saplings, or "wambecks," for holding pails above the fire, still sloped over the charred logs.

"The camp of Job Ross, Esquire," Vance announced, facetiously, and smiling as he stepped out of his canoe. "Guess we had better cook dinner here, Levi, hadn't we?"

"I hope he won't come back while we are eating it," rejoined Myra, stepping ashore, and soon the guides had cut fresh logs, the slabs of bark from the shelter were spread upon supports for a table, and another rustic dinner was cooked and enjoyed by all.

"This backwoods life is just a savage one," Ollie said, "and being so primitive and romantic is what adds the charm. But I miss soap and water after meals."

"And a mirror, also, perhaps," laughed Vance, "and no one can blame you or any lady," he added hastily. "That need is only the evolution from cave-dwellers after all."

"But it's all been an experience I shall live over many times with pleasure," she rejoined, "and one never to be forgotten."

"Even the sleeping part, on fir-twigs or plank floor?" queried Vance.

"Yes, even that; for it must be that way in the woods, I realize. Camp life would not be such if we brought our home comforts with us."

The next day was devoted to a morning trip by all up the bush-hidden brook to the lily pond, and when returning, Levi picked up the four bags of gems with no trouble or hindrance. The afternoon was partially spent in packing up; Vance gave Douglas full directions in regard to continuing the interrupted work, and for supper each of the party enjoyed broiled partridges for a final treat. An early arising came the next morning, tents were struck, and by the time the sun was well up the start was made.

"I am sorry to go," Ollie declared upon taking her seat in the canoe with Letty, which tribute to Uncle Terry's cabin was also added by the other ladies, while all waved farewell to Douglas and Pip, left standing at the landing.

That night they all slept in beds once more at the Mills, and here with the impress and romance of the wilderness fresh in her mind, Ollie lived

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that visit to it all over again. Once more followed the stream winding out of a primal wilderness, with the continual expectation of seeing some wild creature, a deer, a bear, or possibly a lynx, watching her from beneath the dense forest. When night drew near, she once more saw the guides camp-making and cooking. Saw how tents were set up and bedded with fir-twigs. How logs were cut and laid crossways to cook upon from the fire beneath. Once again she sat near the fire on a mossy bank with a tin plate of fried trout in her lap and tin cup of coffee close by. How good that simple meal, even the fried pork and hard-tack tasted! Later, when darkness had enclosed them, how cheery and reassuring the camp-fire seemed while she, with the rest, reclined upon blankets around it! Once more she watched the tree-trunks apparently stalk out of the shadows like specters when the flame grew brighter. Felt a heart leap as some night-prowler "yaoouled" from far away in the wilderness. Listened, almost breathless, to a guide's story of how a bear had once followed him for a mile through a tangled swamp, while the men smoked cob pipes, the fire crackled, and the enclosing trees marched back and forth in the varying zone of light.

What a witching, mysterious experience that

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first evening in the wilderness had been. Later, when the fire had burned to a faint glow, and she, on her fragrant bed of fir-boughs, listened to the loud murmur of the neighboring rapids, how soothing a lullaby they crooned. So much so, that long before the flickering firelight had vanished from the screening canvas of her tent, a sweet dreamless sleep had come to her.

But now, even this first night in the wilderness, with all its charm, did not return with so much heart-interest as her first view of Uncle Terry's cabin, smiling its welcome to her. That rude and quite romantic abode, fully described to her when she, a timid girl, had first come to live with him, had always held a unique attraction for her. An allurements akin to a boy's dream of building and living in a wildwood wigwam. The thought of Uncle Terry's building it to pass the rest of his life also added a strong impression. He had so rescued her from poverty and misery long ago, had been so much to her ever since, that the tendrils of her heart had also gone out to this forest dwelling of his. And so coming upon it, just peeping out of the green woods, that summer afternoon, its open door, its smoke ascending and drifting away into the bordering spruce, its vine-hidden piazza with greensward plot in front, had

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each and all wrought a home-coming charm to her. Thus, leaving it for good, perhaps, now seemed like bidding farewell to dearly loved friends.

A shadow of this regret added pathos to her eyes even when parting from the rest at a far-away and crowded junction, and when Vance had seen her safely seated in her own train, a quiver came to her voice as she bade him good-bye.

"I have much to thank you for," she said feelingly, offering her hand, "and for more than the delightful outing. I shall live it over many, many times in my lonely life, for it has been like a charming dream. Come and see us when you can."

Vance, watching her pathetic smile as the train drew away, felt even more of this farewell mood.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN once more in the city, Vance found himself all out of touch with its life ; needing revision, so to speak. He must now dress, act, eat, and deport himself like a gentleman and not a backwoodsman. His first call after this rehabilitation was upon Editor Sherman.

"Well, I am glad to see you, my boy," was that busy man's greeting. "But why the bandaged arm? And what has become of your Professor? And how is the mine panning out? Sit down and smoke, and tell us all the news fit to print."

"Well, the arm is just a kick from a green-eyed ogre," replied Vance, whimsically. "And the mine has panned out a quarter-million, with several gullies yet to be heard from."

"Good Lord!" gasped Sherman, "and may I say so in a full column? It won't hurt your social standing, you know."

"Not with my beloved relatives," chuckling. "And by the way, Stepsister Blanche wrote me

eight pages to Fort Kent at your suggestion. If you publish my success she'll be after me with a lasso."

"I'll bet on your ducking abilities, my son. But seriously, I must give you a send-off."

"That is just what you must not do," declared Vance. "I wouldn't have the promoters swarming after me for a thousand dollars. They are worse than mad hornets."

"Well, then a quarter-interest in this paper is for sale to you at an even twenty-five thousand, which will put you where you belong, as assistant-editor. And we earn good dividends; never less than eight per cent. Besides, you wield a sharp pen, and we need you. I'll take you in at par, and you can't buy our stock less than one-thirty."

"I'll consider that offer, thank you. It strikes me as good. How long will you keep it open?"

"Until you come in, but the sooner the better." And after Vance had given Sherman a check for his loan, the two shook hands and parted. The sun seemed brighter to Vance, for debt was a burden to him.

He had other reasons for cheerfulness. His ankle was well, he could write legibly, if slowly, with his right hand, was soon to see Ollie once more, and, what was equally consoling, had ample

funds, a small fortune to him, in the bank. And that evening the firm of Moss & Harper held a business meeting.

"I have drawn out and paid my loan from Sherman," Vance told the Professor, "which leaves us equal owners in our bank account. We owe Uncle Terry about thirty thousand dollars for his royalty; we must keep, say ten thousand, for current expenses and pay-roll, and the balance of nearly one hundred and sixty thousand I think we had best divide and invest in good bonds. I am also going to buy a quarter-interest in the 'Argus.' Sherman offers it at par, and later on I shall become a contributing editor. I have also engaged painters and a refitter to put the *Vixen* into commission, and by the last of July I want you and Myra to join me on a cruise to the Cape. You may invite Letty if you wish."

"That is all very nice," smilingly said Myra, who usually had "first choice" in the Professor's home, "and I am in favor of a few days spent in calling on your sweetheart and Uncle Terry. We can then return by rail and leave you to woo her as you so wish, I know."

"Very thoughtful of you, dear little woman," rejoined Vance, also smiling, "but Ollie isn't my sweetheart yet, and may not be for some time.

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You understand the situation, and how she feels about Uncle Terry. I shall certainly woo her as fast as possible, but to hurry matters would bring an inevitable and positive 'no.' "

"I should rather say a conditional 'no' which means a final 'yes,'" responded the more sophisticated Myra. "The sooner she is told just what you mean and want in plain words, the better for you, Vance. Possibly she may put you off, perhaps for a year or two. But that is no harm. You are both young. Only don't act afraid of her."

"I am not, and she knows how I feel and what I hope for. How could she help it?"

"Probably by inference, but plain words at the right time and place are better, my dear boy. I watched that girl very carefully in the woods. Watched her watch you, yes, study you many times, and while she is keen-witted, high-spirited and proud to a fault, almost, she is yet a woman and to be won. Of course she is devoted to Uncle Terry, as well she might be. Feels a deep obligation to him as she ought to feel. But from what you and the Professor have told me about him, when it comes to a decision, he is too broad and kindly a man to object. I am positive he would not be so selfish."

"But that would not relieve Ollie from her sense of obligation. I too have studied her, and I tell you she is a very unusual girl. I doubt she would accept his 'Yes, go and marry him, if you love him,' at par value. I shall propose it the first good opportunity, also expecting a decided negative for an answer. That will not discourage me at all. I will wait for her just the same, if need be, even until Uncle Terry and Aunt Lissy have both passed on.

"But she is, as I said, an unusual girl. So much so that when we parted she said, 'I have more to thank you for than even what you have done to make my outing pleasant.' Now you, who are girl-wise, please tell me what she meant by that?"

"Oh, probably that you were tactful or considerate enough to omit even a hint of love while she was your guest, as of course you would be. But in her own home it is quite different. You are her guest then, and at the right and proper place to woo her. The fact that she so thanked you proved that she appreciated your consideration, and argues well for you."

"But how about our cruise? Will you and Pro be ready for it in two weeks?"

"I am agreeable to it," the Professor answered,

"but it is, as Myra says, best for us to make a short stay at the Cape. The Terrys are your friends, mainly. They will inevitably wish to entertain us, but as we haven't even been invited to call, one meal and one evening will be good form, I should say."

"But we have the invitation," corrected Myra. "In fact, Ollie urged me to make her a lengthy visit and bring you with me. But that is not advisable just at present, or not until we have first entertained her. That is etiquette, you know."

"Oh, hang etiquette," rejoined Vance bluntly, "for I want to give you both a good outing there. Lobster-broils on the shore in some quiet cove, fishing-trips, and all that sort, with Ollie along. She couldn't go without a chaperon, you know, and you must be one for my sake. Besides, having been a prisoner in the woods for ten months, am I not entitled to some fun with my boat?"

"Of course you are," laughed Myra, "and we will fix it somehow, as you put it in that way. Anything to bring you and Ollie together, even the abuse of conventionality. Perhaps we can manage an exchange of visits on the *Vixen* to please you, you impetuous boy. Only we must be back by the first week in August. We have carpenters coming then to build a piazza around

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three sides of the house and add an ell on the north side. And plumbers, too," she added gleefully. "I want bath-rooms for every chamber, now that we can afford more conveniences."

"Better move the house away and build a new one," suggested Vance. "It will cost less and be nearer right," and thus the three exchanged plans and prospects for the future.

A great surprise came to Uncle Terry three days later in the shape of a business statement from Vance with an enclosure of a draft for thirty thousand dollars. That made him gasp!

He had been told by Ollie how Vance had found the stolen gems and what success had been met in mining, but, uncertain as he had been about the actual worth of those green crystals, to receive so tangible a proof was astounding. It did not seem quite right to him, either, to accept so large a sum. But here it was with a little note saying, "I am more than glad to enclose what is your due, and assure you that there is more coming. Am planning to see you in about two weeks and fill up on lobsters."

"He kin hev 'em, 'n' everything else on this island 'cept Lissy 'n' Ollie," Uncle Terry said to himself, reading the draft over once more to see if his eyes had not deceived him. "'N' I s'pose he'll

hev to hev Ollie some day," he added, sighing. "Things kinder p'int that way. But I hope he won't be in a hurry. We need her more'n he does."

Just how he felt toward Ollie was evinced the next day when he went to Bath and deposited the thirty thousand dollars in three savings banks to her credit. "I'll keep quiet 'bout this," he thought, "'n' later on I kin s'prise her." Then went back to his lobster-catching, serene and philosophic as ever.

Ollie also received a brief missive from Vance saying, "I am very busy getting ready for my own outing, you can guess where. Shall come in the *Vixen* and have persuaded Pro and Myra to join me for a few days only."

In a way it was a bitter-sweet message, for while Ollie knew he would come, wished to do everything possible to entertain him, indeed felt under obligation to do so, yet she had firmly made up her mind that they could be nothing but good friends to one another. "I positively must not let him think otherwise," she said to herself, "and if only he will be content with that, we can both be quite happy."

She then wrote him : "I shall be very glad to see you and your friends, and so shall we all be.

I feel deeply indebted to you for my more than charming visit to the woods and shall anticipate returning all within my power. I think we can plan a few outings here that will be enjoyable to all. I have lived over those in the wilderness many times since and each recollection brings its own romantic charm. I hope our ocean-flavored ones may have the same good fellowship as those. That could not be improved upon."

Vance, reading between the lines, easily saw what she meant he should see, a good-friends-only continuation.

In a way, he felt grateful for so much ; and for the feeling that in due time he could win more by a patient and considerate wooing. Also for his belief that the young minister's face had without doubt faded from her horizon.

"Ollie has proffered me the Platonic hand by letter," he said to Myra that evening, smilingly, "and says let us be good friends and no more." Then he quoted her concluding words verbatim.

"Of course, and with sincerity, no doubt," rejoined Myra. "I think she feels that is wisest and best for the present. And perhaps it is, all things considered. But I would certainly advise you to make your hopes and wishes clear to her, as I said. You may do it in a 'between-the-lines' manner,

so as not to disturb the sisterly relation she wishes maintained, but let it be made clear, then stop."

Having duly considered Myra's advice, Vance felt that she was right.

"That girl positively refuses to be flattered except by implication, as she put it," continued Vance, "and in that is peculiar, in fact, refreshing. I tried it several times and was sincere, but she rebelled at it. Now I will propose by implication, as you advise, Myra, and keep on courting by that method. Wonder how an implied kiss would seem," he added, smiling.

"Oh, the kisses will keep," Myra rejoined laughingly, "and seem all the better. If you win her, you can have them when you want them and when you don't."

Vance had quite a lengthy interview with Sherman a few days later, when he called to accept and close up that editor's business proposition.

"I have decided to accept your offer to let me become a sort of understudy on the paper, so to speak," Vance said after that, "and let my men manage the mine. Of course I shall go there now and then for a day or two. But I have lived the lumberjack life all I care to for the present."

"Do you think your managing man is strictly honest?" Sherman asked, smiling.

"He came so recommended by this Ross Bickford."

"And the rest of your men, three, I think you said?"

"Why, yes, I feel sure one, my old friend Levi, is."

"And they all know you have taken out what seems to them a big fortune, don't they?"

"Why, yes and no. Douglas, the manager, is the only one who has an approximate idea of how much actual value we have obtained."

"And he is a comparatively poor man working on salary?"

"Yes, seventy-five dollars a month and board."

"And these pockets you open yield about how much?"

"Oh, from one hundred to a thousand dollars or more each."

"Well," rejoined Sherman, after a moment's thought, "if I were you, I'd stay right there on the ground until I had obtained about all I needed, and not leave too much temptation before even an ordinarily honest man. It's unwise. Honesty is an awfully leaky barrel. Suppose your men happened to open another forty-thousand-dollar pocket? Do you think the barrel would stand the strain?"

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"Perhaps not," admitted Vance, thoughtfully.

"As for your writing," continued Sherman, "you can do about as much there as here. Stories of wood-life are always good. Write-ups on mineralogy will go. And I can send you subjects I think you can handle, to enlarge upon for editorials once a week. But stick to your mine until snow comes, then shut off the power till spring."

Vance, after giving this advice more thought, decided that Sherman was right. He might, as he next considered, make himself more comfortable in camp. Could take in a better bed, easy-chairs, a writing-table, books. John could easily go out and back in one day by using a small canoe. The one thing Vance disliked most was to be so alone, week in, week out, or with only his men for company.

"I suppose I'd better stick it out for the present," he admitted to the Professor and Myra, after reporting Sherman's advice.

"But you won't be so much alone as you imagine," rejoined Myra, encouragingly. "Books will help some, letters twice a week, even more. And think what an elegant chance to write undisturbed. You can break away to visit Ollie once a month. Why, you ought to anticipate

it, and be glad to escape the rush, push, and din of city life."

"You are good on counting blessings, anyhow," laughed Vance in answer, "and possibly you are right. Anyhow, for financial reasons, it's me for the woods till snow falls."

The more Vance thought the matter over, how unwise it was to tempt his men, how many conveniences he could surround himself with at camp, the less irksome the task seemed. "I'll buy a small power-boat to use between the Mills and the lower rapids," he thought, and the next day he looked the matter up and ordered one shipped on to Grindstone at once.

But a certain red-roofed cottage in an open dingle, and a certain sweet face abiding there were most in his thoughts just now, and the two weeks yet to pass before he could sail away to this charmed island seemed a waste of valuable time. They did pass, even as life passes to us all, and one bright morning the *Vixen*, with an engineer and assistant aboard and three passengers, sailed away to an Ultima Thule for Vance.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE ocean was without a ripple. The long ground-swells reflected the afternoon sun, and a fringe of white wave-wash outlined the weedy rocks of the Cape, when Vance, glass in hand, and pointing to a green-capped isle on the right, ran in from seaward. A few gulls, circling overhead, clamored a coast welcome when the *Vixen* slowed down outside this island, and dipped her colors just as the Professor fired a tiny cannon on her bow. A white-clad girl, also glass in hand, waved an answer from the piazza of a red-roofed cottage, then the yacht moved on around the island, and later dropped anchor in the Cape harbor.

“Well, what next, Myra, to be strictly proper?” Vance queried.

“Why, you must pay your respects to the lady,” she replied, “and after that it’s up to her.”

“And will you go along, too?”

“Why, yes, if you wish,” and soon Vance, with Myra steering the yacht’s tender, was pulling away

toward the well-known V-shaped inlet to meet Ollie awaiting them on the floating wharf.

"I am very glad to see you both," she said as Vance helped Myra out, and after the usual feminine exchange of kisses and the hand-shake for Vance, Ollie led the way up the stairs.

"And you were watching for us, were you?" Vance next asked.

"Why, yes," hesitatingly. "From your letter I guessed you would be here this afternoon." Then Ollie invited Myra in, while Vance chose an easy-chair on the piazza. He was left alone a long quarter-hour, and then Ollie joined him.

"Well, we are here," he then said, "and at your service for a few days. And now what can we plan to make them pleasant for you?"

"Or rather what can I do in that line?" Ollie answered, smiling. "I feel it is my turn now. First, you will please go after the Professor, and bring his sister's belongings ashore. I have persuaded her to be my guest during your stay. I feel it will be much pleasanter for her. And you are all to have supper with us."

"That suits me. What farther plans?"

"I think we would better leave them to Uncle. He has quite a number mapped out, and you can safely do so. In fact he has talked of little else

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for the past two weeks." Then she added, "It must seem good to you to have two arms once more. I congratulate you."

When Vance, after paying his respects to Aunt Lissy, pulled away to the yacht, it seemed to him that no spot on earth was quite so beautiful as this green island. And it was beautiful to other eyes than love-inspired ones, for its grand cliffs appeared like protecting bulwarks.

Uncle Terry was awaiting Vance and the Professor when they pulled alongside his floating wharf, and his "Mighty glad to see ye both," was as cordial as ever. "I've ben 'spectin' ye quite a spell now, countin' the days, in fact," he continued, leading the way up the stairs, "'n' I've got a lot o' doin's laid out fer ye, 'n' lobsters, clams, 'n' all the fixin's to go with 'em, all waitin'."

That evening on the piazza was a charming one, with a nearly full moon outlining its glinting path, while the three men smoked and Vance recounted his adventures, with the women listening. But when Vance told the story of Job Ross and his two appearances on the scene, with the outcome, Uncle Terry roared with laughter. "Ye sartinly turned the tables on him," he said after that, "'n' sarved him jest what he desarved. But

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what an all-'round, dyed-in-the-wool dern fool he war to come snoopin' 'round yer camp to steal. 'Specially when thar wa'n't no need on't. 'N' he war the shark who wanted my timber, the skeezicks! I wisht I cud 'a' ben thar to see him sign the note. It 'ud 'a' ben wuth all o' three hundred to watch him then. Did he pay it?"

"Oh, yes," laughed Vance. "I knew he would, and I guess he was glad to get off so easily."

"Wal, it's 'most allus the case in this world," rejoined Uncle Terry philosophically, "'n' the biter generally gits bit. Not allus, o' course, 'n' not right away, but generally in the long run."

But this peaceful summer evening, with the group enjoying it, was not quite what Vance wanted. Instead, he wished to have Ollie to himself, and stroll around the island, or sit upon some convenient rock and chat while watching the moonlit ocean. But it was not to be, and after plans for the morrow had been outlined by Uncle Terry, and he and the Professor were once more aboard the *Vixen*, Vance felt that one charming evening had been wasted for him.

"I think our friend, Uncle Terry, has about the right idea of living," the Professor commented, when both were next enjoying cigars on the

after-deck. "He has no cares, no ambitions beyond a simple life; sets his pots and tends them at his leisure, has a nice secluded home far away from all disturbance, two devoted women to take care of him, and his life must be one dream of peace. I almost envy him."

"And so do I," rejoined Vance, thinking of how isolated his own life was to be for many months.

"But it all depends upon our previous life. Once we grow accustomed to our surroundings, no others seem quite to fit. He would be miserable in the city. You and I might be on his island after a month. It's all a matter of habit."

"But why not change our habit to what seems more attractive? All humanity appear to be anxious to do so."

"Yes, we are an uneasy swarm, I admit, and most believe others are better off than they are. Contentment is a rare thing among us all."

"But Uncle Terry evidently has it."

"Yes, because life here for so many years has made him so. Besides, I guess he is a philosopher, and maybe we are not philosophers." And so the discussion ended.

Uncle Terry became very active the next day, when, according to his plan, the entire party was taken by him to a lonely island, with just a few

scrub-spruce on it. Driftwood was gathered and a typical coast clambake prepared and eaten, as the sea-gulls kept up their clamor and the ocean breeze its cooling caress. After that, while the Professor and Myra clambered over this wave-beaten, seldom-visited ledge, Vance obtained his coveted chance for a conversation with Ollie.

"This is quite different from our last picnic beside that misnamed Misery Pond," she began, while glancing around over the rippled ocean, "and which do you enjoy the better?"

"Why, this of course, for it's such a change," Vance rejoined. "Which is your choice?"

"Why, that one and for the same reason," she quickly answered. "It's all a question of change."

"And our *bête noire* also, this never-ceasing wish for something else, some other and newer surrounding."

"An illusion, I presume you would call it," she returned, with twinkling eyes.

"Yes, it is that exactly, and rather unfortunate. You live here until sated by what appeals to me grand and beautiful. Then you visit the wilderness to become enraptured by a sequestered lakelet, its blossoming lilies, and the view of a heather-blooming swamp."

"And you," she rejoined archly, "grow weary

of the wildwood lakes, woods and swamp, and are ready to exclaim over wave-washed islands and the ocean view."

"Yes, I admit it, and that is why I say it is unfortunate; this perpetual wanting-a-change feeling. Besides, it costs us a lot of money."

"And spoils the happiness of so many who must forever stay at home," Ollie added with a sigh. "I was one for many years, and know what it means. I know, too, how much more wretched the poor people in the city must feel."

"You make yourself unhappy by so doing. I recall discussing that with you once before, beside our trout-pool. And I think you promised to be good ever after."

"But how can one help thinking of others less fortunate?"

"Perhaps it isn't possible, but you must, or else spoil your own sunshine. It's all a matter of self-control, and to be happy one must be selfish in thought, anyway."

"I admit that," looking away over the sparkling ocean, "but one's own bringing-up, one's early experiences have much to do with habits of thought. Now, your early life was quite different from mine, I assume. Hence the difference in your outlook upon life. To be able to forget pov-

erty means that one has never seen much of it, while I have. In fact, I am forced to keep on seeing it right here, most of the time."

"And I assume your Cape fisher-folk, those whose lives have made you so keenly sympathetic, are now envying me the *Vixen* lying at anchor before their eyes."

"Probably, since poverty and envy usually go hand in hand. But that doesn't lessen the sting of poverty."

"But I still assert that it is folly to spoil even one hour of possible sunshine by thinking about it. You must be selfish, or be miserable all the time, so take your choice. You say my bringing-up had much to do with my selfish optimism, and so it had. But I know something about city poverty, and it is so much worse than poverty here that it would make you unspeakably wretched to see it. Here they at least have decent food; there many must beg, steal, or pick up a miserable living as they can. It's that in countless cases, or become paupers.

"But you must forget it," Vance continued as if to dismiss the subject, "and now how about your little lily pond and trout-pool? I have it in mind to fix one for you while here, then go to some inland pond to obtain roots to transplant, and muck for

them to grow in. If it is sweet spring-water, trout will also thrive in the same pool. I shall go back to the woods after my outing here, and come out again before snow comes. I can then bring along a can of trout for you."

"And I shall be more than glad of both," rejoined Ollie, smiling. "I can imagine myself back at your camp by watching them."

"Shall you need them to recall my camp in thought?"

"Why, no, of course not, you persistent man! How can any one forget so romantic a spot? But our island is so small. I see the same old weed-covered rocks, the same spruce-trees over and over, until even a few water-lilies and a dozen trout to watch will be a godsend."

"But you have the ocean always."

"True; but do you know that always reflects my moods, no matter what they are? And when I am sad, the waves sound like 'muffled drums.' " And then Vance glanced out over the white-capped sea smiling in the sunlight, heard the laughter of its waves tossing spray at their feet, and then at Ollie with a dreamy, half-sad and far-away look in her eyes. He had tried to understand her, but she eluded him. Tried to follow her moods to find the wherefore of them, but in vain.

He only knew that somewhere in her short past, or back of that, her life had been saddened, and now her moods kept reflecting that long-ago past. She had shown this mood at his first meeting with her. A little later, by a rather pathetic letter ; again, in the woods ; and now, with the ocean almost shouting its merry mood, she gazed far to seaward, as if into a dim eternity.

"Do you believe in transmigration, Ollie?" he inquired suddenly, and on the instant she faced around with a troubled question in her eyes.

"Why do you ask?" she responded, smiling faintly. "Is it because I am dreamy? I always am when I follow my own thoughts out on the ocean. It's like looking out upon the future."

"But do you believe in transmigration?" Vance persisted. "In the circling progress of soul-life from low to higher form, according to Hindoo teaching, until finally the soul reaches Nirvana, or perfect content?"

"Why, no, I hardly do, and yet sometimes I feel that I must have lived in some other form before. It's a vague intuition of mine. I never told even Uncle about it. And yet I have it. Why did you guess so?"

"Because I have seen your persistent leaning toward melancholy. I've tried to follow your

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moods many times, and they invariably lead to the other highways of life, not your own. The inevitable one over which some primal procession is marching."

"I know it, but I can't help it," she admitted, half sadly. "And I also know I am wrong in so doing. As for the Hindoo's soul-shifting, it seems a plausible belief to me. A broad one, in fact. To say that a good dog, the most faithful and loving friend a man has, has no soul, seems arrant egotism on our part. And it is only we of the enlightened faith, so called, that have that selfish ego. So far as I have read, all other religions, like that of the Indians, endow all animals with soul life. But why did you ask that question?"

"Simply because in studying you, or trying to, it seems to me that somewhere back in your lineage, an absorbing, lifelong sadness dominated an ancestor of yours. Hence your own predisposed moods. Your half-melancholy, so to speak. I am positive you can't help it. That you would if you could. But, as I said to you that day beside the trout-pool, it is all wrong. You are young and charming. Life is all before you, and, best of all, you have the attributes that win friends. In fact, you have everything to make you cheerful, and nothing to sadden you. Do you wonder

I feel like scolding you? To me it seems wicked."

"And I promised to be good that day, too," with a light laugh.

"Surely you did, but that won't change you. Your moods are beyond your control, I know. It's only to try to get you back on your own highway and keep you there that I am arguing."

"And I thank you for the good will and wish. But did it ever occur to you how utterly alone I am, or soon must be, in life? Why, it's like looking out over this broad ocean to me all the time."

"Well, you may marry happily."

"But that is not even probable. You know how I feel, and why. And feeling as I do, I would be false to myself not to dismiss even that illusion."

"But suppose that illusion came to you with all its sweet charm and power? Suppose it continued its hold upon your feelings until nothing else was left you? No duties, no obligation, I mean. Would you still deny it?"

For one long moment Ollie looked far to seaward, even out to the dim, mist-bordered horizon. And she knew full well what Vance meant. "I might not," she half whispered at last. "I might see nothing else in life for me but to yield to that

fatuous illusion. But if I ever do," more firmly now, "it will be with my eyes wide open to the fact that it is an illusion soon to vanish. I shall never enter on that unknown highway with any false hopes or rainbow anticipations. If I ever marry, it will be with my eyes and ears instead of my heart."

"And so spoil half its charm, perhaps."

"Yes, and perhaps not. I certainly won't have the inevitable awakening to face. The disillusion that you mention and I believe must come. If I start keeping step with *him*, I mean to see him as he is, not as love gilds him."

"Then there will be no illusion."

"No, there will be no illusion."

"But suppose he has it. Suppose he sees you so gilded, what then?"

"Well, if ever in the dim future of my life that happens, I shall do my best to disillusion him beforehand. To strip the gilding away and show him my sad and cynical soul as it is."

"And spoil his mirage as well as your own?"

"Probably, but we should at least start fair. No false rainbows to lead us into brambles and pitfalls." Just then the Professor and Myra came up.

"Why so serious, so sober, you two kidlets?" queried Myra, smiling. "Were you discussing the moral law, or transcendentalism?"

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"Neither," responded Ollie gaily, "but an even more serious question, the illusion of love. The one supreme ignis fatuus of a woman's life."

"And she means never to have any, or allow her Prince Perfect to, either," interjected Vance, laughing. "My belief is that when the time comes she will see the inevitable laurel wreath, and he the white wings."

"I hope so," rejoined Myra, glancing from one to another, "for I believe that must be half the charm."

The white gulls were still circling around and cawing, or perched upon weedy rocks near this island ledge; and the undulating swells still reflected the afternoon sun's red glow, when Uncle Terry's boat began its "chug-chugging" chorus, homeward bound.

"Good-bye to you, my hungry friends," Ollie exclaimed from her perch on the bow as the gulls resumed full possession of the island once more. "Au revoir," she added:

" 'Till the waves washed through the rib-bones,
Till the sea-gulls came no longer
And upon the sands lay nothing
But the skeleton of Nahma.' "

So ended their first day's outing.



"GOOD-BYE TO YOU, MY HUNGRY FRIENDS." - *Page 426.*

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CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN Vance, accompanied by the Professor, strolled over Uncle Terry's island, he found it of greater area than he had supposed. Most of it was covered with a thick growth of scrub-spruce, with a few clumps of stunted oak intermingled; its northern portion of perhaps four acres was bare of trees and consisted of nearly level rock, ending in a bold cliff, while midway was a narrow glade, beginning at the V-shaped inlet where Uncle Terry kept his boats. At the head of this was a walled-in spring with a rill of escaping water, and this tiny vale was shadowed by thick oak and spruce.

"Not a bad location for a summer cottage, right here," the Professor asserted, after the two had returned to the northern point, commanding a wide view of Boothbay.

"It would suit me if Ollie could be persuaded to act as its mistress," replied Vance, "and Uncle Terry would accept me for a neighbor. It would be up to her, however."

"Probably, or rather your persuasive powers, I should say."

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"And thus far they haven't availed much," Vance admitted, regretfully. "While Ollie is more than charming, to the best of my observation, she is unique in her devotion to Uncle Terry, and just won't allow any love interference. I have wooed her all I possibly could for almost a year now, and won just a friendly footing so far, and nothing more. You can see that for yourself."

"Maybe, and maybe not," responded the Professor, smiling. "I am not an expert on such matters, and admit women's ways are beyond me. If maiden hearts were trap-rock, and love due to volcanic action, I'd know where I was at, but they are not. All I can say or see is that Miss Ollie, in her position, must realize that an eligible husband and home of her own would better be acquired some time."

"And that 'some time' is a long way off in her ken just now."

But Vance was here to woo Ollie, meant to win her if in the power of man to do so, and that afternoon he broached the subject of a trout and lily pool below the spring to Uncle Terry.

"O' course, 'n' a good idee, too," that shrewd man admitted, smilingly, and seeing Vance's intention at once. "I'd 'a' done it long 'go myself if I'd 'a' thought. It'll please the girly, 'n' gals

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hev to hev suthin' more'n housework to keep 'em content. Kinder need pets o' some sort, 'n' I'd rather Ollie'd hev a fish-pond 'n to be leadin' a purp 'round by a string. That allus makes me sick." So interested was he in this new plan to amuse his "girlie" that he at once joined in with Vance to carry it out. He ran over to the Cape in his boat to bring a barrel of cement, Vance called both of his men to aid in the work, and by sunset two small dams had been built across the little glade below the spring, earth and sod removed from above the upper one, sand spread in place of that, and so much done toward "suthin' to keep girlie content."

Uncle Terry also proposed a trip to Christmas Cove, twenty miles away, the next day, with all to go along, and have dinner at an old-fashioned hotel. Later, they were to obtain some lily-roots for the lower pool. And now, for the first time, as the *Vixen* ran into the narrow, curved, and perfectly landlocked harbor that gave Christmas Cove its name, Vance saw what a charming spot it was. The summer visitors were here in full force, and most of them were enjoying the beautiful bathing beach. Canoes and small sailboats were moving about over the rippled cove. Flags fluttered above the two hotels. Gaily-clad ladies

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watched the bathers, and when the *Vixen* had been made fast to the Cove's one pile wharf, and the party strolled up to the Gates House, Vance saw a typical old-time tavern with capacious barn in the rear, two vine-hidden piazzas across its front, inviting arm-chairs a-plenty on the lower one, and an old-time Franklin stove within its office. Here Vance was introduced to Sam Gates, that hostelry's droll Boniface, who usually carved the joint and mixed toddy for stage-arriving guests in old-fashioned manner. Just now his weather-browed hotel was packed by tourists from the city. A little later, after "Sam," as Uncle Terry called him, had as usual rung his dinner-bell and then escorted Vance and party to the dining-room, the sojourners rushed in pell-mell, after the manner of such, as if they feared there wouldn't be food enough to go around.

Among these, taking seats just across the dining-room, Vance was astonished to see his step-mother and her two daughters! He was prouder than ever to be seated beside Ollie, garbed as she was in a jaunty white yachting-costume.

Ollie saw them as quickly, and as they stared at her in open-eyed astonishment, flushed slightly, and turned to Vance.

"Your relatives look as if they wanted to bite

me," she said smiling, "and, pardon me, but are such manners typical of city breeding?"

"They are of theirs," rejoined Vance, pointedly, "and what else could you expect? Didn't I tell you they were female bandits? Also how Blanche wrote me a sloppy ten-page letter the day after she heard about our mine discovery? I shall cut them dead if the chance comes, and am very glad you are beside me now."

He did not look at his relatives during the meal, though fully conscious that they kept staring at Ollie, and when he led the way out of the dining-room, he gave them one cool, contemptuous glance.

"I'd like to tell Blanche I received her letter, but 'nothing doing,'" he said to Ollie when they were again seated on the piazza for a few moments. "Only I won't get the chance, I guess. I gave them the cold cut-direct as we left the dining-room."

"And, therefore, I shall escape being introduced," responded Ollie, looking relieved. "It would be a tax even to be polite to them now."

The visit to the old mill-pond above the village came next, and on their return to the wharf, Vance carrying a basket of lily-roots, and the women big bunches of blossoms, he once more had the chance to walk directly past his two stepsisters seated there, without even a glance at them.

"I am in luck to-day, Ollie," he said complacently, as the *Vixen* drew away from the wharf, "and have paid interest, anyway, on the old score."

"You are not a believer in the Biblical 'turn-the-cheek' theory then, I assume?" she queried, smilingly.

"Well, not to any serious extent. It sounds well. It's a nice text to preach about, and useful in Sabbath schools. But I am like an Indian. I never forget either good or ill treatment."

"But is that the Christian spirit?" persisted Ollie, still smiling.

"Probably not. I mean to pay all debts, however, be they social or business, and promptly, too. I also expect everybody else to do the same. But few do, I have found. With most of the world it's a grab-game, keep all you get, and let those you owe do the walking.

"I am a firm believer in the old saw to pay scot and lot as you go along," he continued philosophically, "but my own satisfaction is usually all the reward. Most that I have known fill the go-along rôle all right, but forget the pay part."

"And so the world makes one skeptical, does it?"

"Decidedly so, and more's the pity. It would be Elysium if all lived up to the Golden Rule.

But that seems more and more forgotten every day, and the mad rush for money and personal selfishness all that inspires humanity. Especially so in big cities."

"Then I am glad I am not living there," interjected Ollie, sighing. "To me it is actual pain to see utter and heartless selfishness. It's bad enough to see poverty, just the ordinary kind here, but to observe acute selfishness among well-to-do people would be far worse," and then Vance looked at her long and curiously.

"I guess you are right, quite right," he answered half tenderly, after the pause. "The city world is a monster, a brute, a heartless, selfish, cynical ogre, that would devour and sour every tender thought of yours, give you continual pain, embitter your very soul, and make you utterly pessimistic in a short time. Or else it would drive you into a convent."

"But my visit there last winter was a charming one, and my two friends, Mr. Hale and Dora, and in fact every one I met, were more than nice to me."

"Of course, and there are many splendid people in the city, kind, thoughtful, and very charitable. But they are not in the social swim, living to make a show, marrying solely for money, giving only to

see their names in print, and sneering at domestic morality."

"Well, give me my island home and a few good friends then," Ollie replied. "I positively abominate what you describe as social life in the city."

"But you are not always happy on your island. I recall one letter you wrote me, so sad that I could hear bells tolling."

"Oh, just my mood then," she replied, "and due to that pitiful funeral I wrote about. Life with me is one continued variation of them, like the color of a kaleidoscope, with dark shades predominating."

"Your ancestry again, as I told you the day of our clambake," rejoined Vance lightly, "and what I am continually telling you."

"But how can one help his moods? Can you?"

"No, not always," Vance admitted, slowly. "But one can shake them off if he stops and counts his blessings. If he looks at Nature and shuts his eyes to the world. Hears the birds sing, picks the flowers, watches the waves dance in the sunlight, and listens to the trees whispering. Why, Mother Nature laughs all the time, and sings continually. Do you recall what Emerson declared the big trees said to the busy man? It

was, 'Why so hot, my little sir?' And so it is with all vice, poverty, and human selfishness. Rise above it, forget it and live in your own world. Walk ever on your own highway. Be a 'hermit soul,' and 'live withdrawn to the place of your self-content,' if you please. But don't cross to the sad thoroughfare of saddened and tainted lives."

"I never will again, nevermore," laughed Ollie. "I'm going to be good now, as I promised. Please sing the 'Sweet Bye and Bye,' while the collection-plate is passed." And then Vance laughed, too.

"It's good to see you smile once more," he rejoined, "and like a morning view of the lily pond we just left."

"But I may fail, fall down, in fact, any day," Ollie answered candidly. "It's a woman's privilege."

"And fortunate for us men, maybe. Gives us a chance to lift you up."

"Even the three-hundred-pound ones?"

"Well, I draw the line at about half that. I feel as the old clam-digger said about the little ones, 'The sweetest things in this world are done up in the smallest packages.'" Just then as they passed the head of a cottage-covered island, on

its outer cliff stood a bevy of little girls waving to them.

"There's an object lesson in happiness," Vance asserted, as Ollie returned the salutation. "Those kidlets don't know us. They just see us sailing past and suppose we must feel as they do, so salute us. Just call out 'We are glad to see you,' by so doing, because they are happy."

"And their childhood is fortunate for them," Ollie responded, soberly. "For they will always have pleasant memories, and probably happy moods through life. But there is now and then one who wasn't so blessed," and that rejoinder set Vance to thinking and he recalled what this elusive girl's own childhood had been, and how that had evidently so dominated her life.

He also had cause for further and more serious reflection later on at her home, while watching her attention to her duties there. She was the presiding spirit, hostess, housekeeper, and all. Uncle Terry and Aunt Lissy deferred to her in every way. The meals, the table-service, the seating of guests, the conversation, all devolved on Ollie and were directed by her. Even the outing plans for another day, whether advisable for Aunt Lissy to go or not, and choice where to go, all hinged on this girl's decision. Most of all,

Vance noticed how Uncle Terry in particular was her chief care and claimant of her most tender thought.

"You are the good angel of your home," Vance said to her that evening, after the supper-things had been cleared away and he had induced her to stroll up to the point once more.

"Yes, it is my haven and Heaven both," she answered promptly. "The only home I feel that I have ever had."

"You are its presiding spirit, certainly, and your dominion is charming. But will it always satisfy you?"

"So long as it does, that is sufficient, isn't it? As you said, it is best to live one day at a time, I think."

"But will filial devotion and your sense of obligation continue to be enough?" persisted Vance, as they now took seats on the sofa-rock, as he had named it.

"That I can't say," she answered earnestly. "Only that so far I am content, and feel I always shall be."

"But suppose the love illusion comes, what then? Won't that inspire the wish of a home of your own, its natural result?"

"Most likely," she answered, resting her face in

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both hands and looking out over the moonlit sea. "But I don't mean to give up a tried and satisfying haven for an unknown harbor. One that may hold hidden rocks."

"Not even if love illumines it?"

"No, not even for that fickle beacon, and according to your assertions it is one. An illusion sure to vanish in due time." And then Vance sighed and also looked seaward, very sorry he had given this occult maid such arguments to confound him. He also felt baffled just now, and realized more and more how this girl's very soul was bound up in the two who had given her home and love. His own heart-call seemed selfish, as well, and he one who had come there on robbery bent.

They talked of other things then, the meeting with his relatives, and their scowls, the two pools below the spring, and whether the lilies just planted would live and thrive, and how pleasant it would be if by some miracle a dozen big trout from a certain pool could be transported to a smaller one near by.

"I shall bring you some," Vance promised on their way back. "But your pretty pool will be under ice by that time, and you won't see them again until spring."

"But I shall know they are waiting for me then, and can anticipate them as I do my flower garden."

"So you do live in to-morrow, now and then?"

"Of course; one must in such things. We might tire of flowers if they were always in bloom."

"Then some anticipation, some hope is necessary even to you, now isn't it? Do you know, Ollie," he continued hastily, "what the three things most needful in life are? They are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for."

"And I have all three," she rejoined blithely.

Vance felt his own hopes farther away than ever. He believed Ollie felt more than friendship for him. That her devotion to Uncle Terry was the sole barrier against him. He had tried his best to win her, knew that she was perfectly conscious of his feelings and wishes. And yet, approach her as deftly as he could, and had done in many ways, she still evaded him. Still raised the duty-wall against him. And in such a pathetic, earnest manner that he felt powerless. But he was not disheartened. Some time she would need him, he felt. Some day she must yield to the inevitable law of sex. Some hour, some moment

must come when her heart would call for him. That night when he and the Professor were back on board the *Vixen*, Vance smoked in glum silence, not counting his blessings, as he had so often advised Ollie to do, but rather his chances of winning her, and whether or not to risk the answer now or wait until three months more of her isolated and monotonous life had worked its weal for him.

The time and place in the placid harbor were typical of her life. On two sides of this the Cape's fringing half-circle of fisher-folk houses, a few white, but many brown, were outlined, clear and distant in the moonlight, yet none showed a single light from within. To the left of the road up over the hill lay another as silent village, with more white and fewer brown headstones in serried rows. Outside, on the point, Uncle Terry's old lighthouse stood sentinel, like a tall, grim monument, with slowly flashing light, while from all around came the unceasing monotone of the ocean. Just now that low, persistent boom, first faint and far away, then rumbling nearer, brought to Vance the same impression, the same sadness it had to Uncle Terry years before. He saw Ollie's schoolhouse, a pitiful little temple. The Cape church with its low, square belfry, and re-

calling one sad mood of Ollie's, voiced by letter to him, once more he glanced upward to the white headstones glistening in the moonlight, then around and across to her island home rising, capped with green and brown, above the fringing wave-wash. All these were her orbit. Her out-of-the-world corner. Her niche, in a sad and somber, billow-beaten coast-line of frowning, weed-draped rocks. The wonder of it all was that she, keen of mind, sensitive, tender-hearted, with a craving for a broader life, could doom herself to this pathetic, monotonous one, year in, year out. And all for filial duty.

After watching Vance long and intently, the Professor spoke.

"What's come over you, son?" he queried. "Are you moon-struck?"

"Maybe I am," admitted Vance, slowly, after a long puff at his cigar. "I am struck, anyhow."

"Well, out with it, son. Is it the girl?"

"Yes, mainly, and yet something more than that. I am trying to measure the difference between solemn and pathetic isolation and the busy world we live in."

"And can you?"

"Well, hardly, as yet, but they seem as wide

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apart as the poles. Say, Pro," he added hastily, "could you live here just as Uncle Terry does and be content?"

"Most certainly not, unless I were born over again."

"But suppose you were Ollie, young, charming, beautiful, one to compel admiration from all men, envy from most women, and love from all friends? How much more impossible would it then seem to you?"

"Why, utterly and absolutely so."

"And yet that is just what she means to do, and all for the sake of duty."

"But can't you persuade her to hie away with you? She must know you can lavish all kinds of money on a home and wife."

"Well, if all this grim, monotonous isolation, this treadmill life she lives, with billows beating 'muffled drums' without cessation, isn't persuasion enough, how can I add more?"

"But won't her heart do the rest? Myra says she is a good deal in love with you. And women can read their own sex surely."

"No, her own heart won't do the rest," Vance declared. "In fact, it's that very important motive force that locks her fast here. You know all about her childhood, born and raised in poverty.

How she was left a town charge and drudge for old Ben, the stage-driver, until Uncle Terry rescued her. And to pay her debt to him here she would stay, even if love tore her heart asunder, and I knelt at her feet."

"And you believe this to be true?"

"Just as much as I believe I am sitting on this deck just now."

"Well, I can see it will be a long, long time before you marry, my son, for you are one who will never give her up."

"Yes, that it will be, for I never will give her up," echoed Vance. "Besides, to be just, I must consider Uncle Terry. He has actually more claim on her than a father. She is his all in all in life."

The Professor had been sound asleep long before Vance ceased to feel the *Vixen* gently rocking on the incoming swells.

CHAPTER XXXV

THERE was yet one more thought for Ollie within the reach of Vance, and that was to stock her two tiny pools with pond-fish until he could bring trout for them out of the woods, and the next day he proposed another trip to Christmas Cove and the old mill-pond for that purpose.

“We’d best make an early start,” Uncle Terry suggested, “buy a couple o’ big cans o’ Ras Bascom, who keeps store thar, ’n’ hire a couple o’ boys to help fish. We’ll want quite a lot, ’cause some’ll die in the cans. Arter that we kin run to Pemaquid ’n’ see the old fort. Thar’s a nice harbor thar with islands, ’n’ we kin go ashore on one ’n’ brile some lobs.” So another day’s outing was planned.

The early start was made, and by the time Christmas Cove was awake, Ollie and Myra were watching three men and two husky lads angling for perch and roach in the lily-dotted pond above that village, and within two hours both cans held all that would live for any great length of time in them.

One incident occurred on the way back to the *Vixen* that gave Vance almost as much satisfaction as thus securing finny pets for Ollie. He had halted at this Bascom's store to buy needed supplies for his yacht, while the rest kept on to the wharf, and emerging, whom should he meet but Blanche !

"Why, my dear Vance," she gushed, almost pouncing upon him, "this is a more than delightful surprise," and perforce he had to accept her proffered hand. "And what are you doing here and where are you stopping?" she rattled on. "And why weren't you more sociable the other day in the hotel, and why didn't you wait to present your friends to us?"

For the first time in his life Vance felt utterly nonplussed. He had for over three years cherished a bitter hatred for all three of his relatives-by-law. This Blanche, who, as he felt, had lost all sense of decency by writing him as she had, was the most obnoxious. Yet here she was, lavishing watery smiles and gushing talk on him as if he were a long-lost brother. For one instant the natural ire in him arose as he calmly surveyed this artificial woman, and sneering words almost escaped him. Then the gentleman in him conquered.

"Well, Blanche," he answered calmly, yet with

faint contempt, "I guess the reason I didn't see you in the hotel was the same as yours when you and your sister cut me dead one day in the city not so long ago."

"But you are mistaken, dear Vance," Blanche lied glibly, "for we have never seen you since you left us so—so unkindly three years ago, or not until that evening in the theater."

"Well, I can swear you didn't see me that day in the street, not after I got within ten feet of you," Vance rejoined ironically. "But that doesn't matter," he continued with more sarcasm; "it's a lady's privilege not to see any poor or ineligible fellow."

"But, Vance dear," she still persisted, "won't you please forgive and forget and let us be friends once more? You don't know how much it would please Mamma—all of us, in fact—if you would. And now please take me along and introduce me to the charming girl I see you are so devoted to. I have found out who she is," this wily one continued, "and I do so want to meet her. Can't we all be friends once more?"

For some time Vance gazed down into the faded and quite old girl-face upraised to his, then calmly answered, "No, Blanche, your mother and I can never be friends again. I am not blaming

you or your sister in the matter. You might have been told, probably were, but you were not actual parties to the conspiracy. But you must excuse me from discussing the question further. It's not an agreeable subject. And, by the way," he added, moving on, "Sherman of the 'Argus' told me you telephoned him for my address the day after he blazoned our mine discovery and I received your letter after some delay. It was quite—well—thoughtful of you to write."

"But, my dear brother," she still urged with almost a tremor, "isn't life too short to cherish malice—ill-feeling, I mean? Mamma is getting old. Sister and I need your good-will, your friendship, far more than you believe. Won't you please call on us once more when in town again? Won't you please?" with almost a sob. "Just once for old-times' sake? Maybe poor Mamma might have a few words she would like to say to you."

Vance halted once more, for despite all the wrongs he had brooded over so long, despite his disgust for pride-lacking Blanche, she yet was a relative and a woman. More than that, he knew that she realized that she had naught except money to anticipate in life, or possibly with that to buy a make-believe love from some man. The very hopelessness of it all seemed pathetic. One

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instant only Vance hesitated, then held out his hand. "Yes, Blanche," he said, "I will forgive and forget the past and call on you all when I return to the city."

Much to his surprise, she turned away and hastily drew forth a handkerchief. Vance felt strangely moved.

"I have met my enemy, and defeat," he admitted to Ollie, as they sailed out of the cove.

"And so did I," she answered, smiling, "when she gave me a long, lingering look just after you had left us."

"Would you like to meet her? She is anxious to be introduced."

"Why," hesitatingly, "I have no objection. Your sister has never harmed me. But how did she capture you?"

"Oh, by pleading, a woman's way. And she looked so old for her years that I had to give in and promise to forgive and forget my wrongs." And then Ollie gave him an approving smile.

"You have done well," she said. "And yet I knew you would when the time came. I had faith in you."

The stop at Pemaquid and inspection of its fort, three hundred years old, and graveyard, its museum, and section of cobblestone roadway

buried under four feet of soil by earthworms were all of keen interest to Vance and Myra, and to the Professor particularly.

"It's a curious thing, this evolution of headstones," the latter commented when strolling among the low, moss-coated ones in this antiquated yard. "Here we have the soul-theory typified by a winged face cut on almost every stone."

"And what is the meaning you refer to?" questioned Myra, stooping to examine one of the grotesque imitations of a human face.

"Why, only the fifteenth-century desire thus to explain death, and their own faith in soul-life."

"I think that is less absurd than the epitaphs in vogue then," added Ollie, trying to read one. "And such inane doggerel, too. Listen to this:

" ' Here lies ye body of Nancy Baker,
The cruel hand of death did take her.
She's waiting now in this God's acre
To hear ye summons of her Maker.' "

Isn't that excruciating?"

"Whoever was the composer thought it beautiful poetry, no doubt," said the Professor, "and the Jack-o'-lantern imitation of a face, high art. And that is what I mean by the evolution of head-

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stones, or rather the comparison between human ideas then and now, as expressed by them."

"It all seems to me a little pathetic," Ollie rejoined, looking over the grass-grown enclosure, with small slate stones all awry, or fallen flat. "And more so because a spot like this, which should be sacred, is left to be trampled by curiosity-seekers like us, who smile at its absurd epitaphs."

"But what would you expect?" questioned Vance. "This is only an antique curiosity, after all, and like the mummies exhibited in our museums. We live in a day and generation that would use them for fuel on railroads."

"But this is pathetic to me," protested Ollie, "and the weeds and bushes trying to hide these poor little mossy headstones makes it more so. Nature has more pity than humanity."

"But you couldn't convince the natives here of that," Vance answered, "for they are wise enough to know this neglected graveyard is an asset. It is a card that draws visitors. The wonder is that they don't wall it in and charge an admission, as they do to the old fort and worm-buried roadway."

A more enjoyable experience occurred an hour later when Uncle Terry set up his stone fireplace on a little lone rocky island, gathered driftwood,

and began broiling his "lobs," while the rest aided Ollie in fetching all the other "fixin's" from the yacht and setting table on a broad, flat rock. It was a rude, yet romantic meal, soon made ready, and the ocean breezes added their usual zest to the broiled lobsters and coffee. Then the *Vixen* sailed away over the sparkling sea, homeward bound.

Another exchange of opinions occurred between Ollie and Vance on the way, however, for as they passed close by a small spruce-covered island, with a few cottages nestling amid its green trees, there, just below a shading cliff, sat a pair in lover-like position. So enthralled were they that they neither saw nor heard the *Vixen* drawing near.

"Case of twenty-two hearts that beat as eleven," Vance remarked facetiously, as he pointed to them.

"Or the illusion that makes them oblivious of all the world, you mean," said Ollie, as the girl, now spying the yacht, sat up suddenly. "Too bad we interrupted it."

"Surprised it, you mean," corrected Vance. "Nothing can interrupt that illusion except satiety." He raised a glass to continue his inspection of this one as the *Vixen* drew away.

"No, that isn't fair," chided Ollie, laying her

hand upon his arm. "Let them dream on, undisturbed. The awakening will come all too soon, I imagine."

"But isn't it better to dream and be awakened than never to dream at all?"

"Decidedly not, from my viewpoint. To me, that dream once awakened would forever seem like faintly tolling bells, or childhood memories, after many years."

"But suppose the dreams come against your will, what then?"

"Why, pay the penalty just the same. I fail to see how one's will plays any part, however. If it did, few women would marry, except for money."

"And what of the other party, for there must be two?"

"Why, suffer a few months, perhaps, then find consolation. I doubt that love means one tithe as much to man as to woman. To him it is a transitory need. It is a woman's soul, however, which is why I fear it. I can well understand why so many have sacrificed heart, soul, body, name, fame, and everything for love's sake. I have never heard of many men doing so."

"Do you mean all you say, Ollie?" Vance questioned, with a shade of pain, "or all you let me infer?"

"I mean all I say ; truly so. But I don't wish you to infer anything. I am not speaking in riddles or proffering hints. Just being frank ; that is all. As for myself, I hope to keep awake. No love illusions if I can escape them."

"But you have all the attributes that create the supreme illusion. You are, pardon me, captivating enough to win all men's admiration, and bound to be flattered and pursued. You have keen sympathies, a tender heart, a poetic soul, a love for all that is refined and beautiful, and these all make for love. How can you hope to escape it?"

"Nevertheless, I mean to," she answered firmly, "and my one sheet-anchor is the heart-and-soul debt I owe. You know what that is. I've declared it often enough. Even to think of renouncing it makes me feel guilty."

For one moment Ollie glanced aft to Aunt Lissy, fast asleep in a capacious easy-chair, to Myra and the Professor on the bow, watching the island and ocean panorama, then to Uncle Terry steering in the little pilot-house ; and then back to Vance still watching her. "You know what I was," she continued, as if pleading, "and what has been done for me. You also must see what I am to him, and how it will not be many years be-

fore I shall be his only staff. And now I ask you if you wouldn't despise me if I allowed any love illusion to come between me and my self-evident obligation? I certainly should despise myself.

"And now, my friend," she continued after a long pause and sigh as she looked seaward, "please let us drop this love-illusion question before it becomes a personal one. You are a broad man, and I think you understand me. I am only a weak girl, and just a little afraid of myself. Were I alone, were I without an absorbing sense of duty and obligation, I might and probably should welcome a strong man's tender care and protection. As it is, I must still walk alone."

Vance, following her seaward gaze, saw the same mist-bordered horizon. To him, that dim enclosing shadow seemed like his own hopes, and as the future of his own life must be.

The *Vixen* glided noiselessly onward, courtesying to the long swells and tossing spray lightly from her sharp bows. To the right, new vistas of shore, headlands, and green islands kept opening. To left, the dim and misty Atlantic. A few white-winged coasters far away shone faintly like specters in the shadowy distance. Now and then grey and white gulls, just ahead, rose heavily from the undulating swells, cawed clamorously

while circling about, then lit upon the placid ocean once more.

And still those two, linked in thought, yet wide apart in intent, kept watching the misty horizon line in silence. And not until Damariscove Island, green and bare, shut it out, and the Cape harbor opened into view did Vance speak. "Ollie," he said, low and tenderly, "I am your friend, and I wish to be the best and dearest one you have beside Uncle Terry. I wish I could be more, but as I cannot, I am grateful to be that. I think I understand you fully as well as you understand yourself. The best of your life and mine is still ahead, so let us cling to that as a flowery field yet to be crossed. Do your duty as your conscience demands, only let me share a little of it as a brother might."

"I will, gladly," she answered in the same tone, "and more than that, I wish to feel I can confide in you as I would not in any other man.

"You have been thoughtful of me and for me as no other man ever was," she added, as the *Vixen* drew near to her island home. "And for all that and all else I am more grateful than you probably realize. I knew you would be, long ago, else I never should have gone to your camp. And I did not misjudge you, for no man could have

been more a brother than you were. And so let us still remain—just that. Just two who wish confidence and give confidence.”

Her words gave Vance a new sense of elevation, and the feeling that he had at least a loving sister who might some time become more than that to him. But he had not quite outlined his own hopes and wishes to her, and so that evening he again invited her to stroll up to the point, and to their now familiar sofa-rock.

“I have been thinking, and seriously, too, of all you said and wished this afternoon, Ollie,” he began, clasping her arm to guide her along the scarcely visible path.

“But why think of it at all?” she parried, hastily. “We understand each other; isn’t that enough?”

“It is a good deal, and I am thankful to have you for a sister.”

“Enough to let it go at that and not discuss it?”

“Why, yes, if you insist.”

“I think it is better; just the same as it is better to drop any bygone happening that isn’t pleasant to think of.”

“But this is pleasant to me,” Vance persisted, and to this the elusive girl made no response.

“I may be peculiar, whimsical, perhaps,” she

continued in kindlier tone, after they were seated, "but friendship means more to me than to some, I fancy. And one thing is to leave all claims, all wishes, all the give and take that belongs to the bond of friendship unspoken, and inferred only. To exact promises bespeaks a lack of confidence, I think. To give them conveys the inference that they are needed. If I say I am your friend, your sister if need be, that includes all that those assertions can mean in word, deed, or confidence.

"Take my position or obligation to Uncle Terry, for instance," she continued more earnestly. "He has never asked me to promise anything, not even a smile. And yet I know, unasked, what he expects of me, and I do it. And so has he done for me and by me, all that I had any right to expect, and far more, without even a hint from me. And that is what I mean by the bond of friendship. To have all that pertains to it unspoken and unasked."

"It is a broad and beautiful conception," Vance responded, seriously, "and one I should expect from you. I think I can see, also, why you neither wish to give nor exact promises. It is that you can have the pleasure of doing or giving without the obligation. And the satisfaction of receiving what was neither asked nor promised."

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"That is it exactly, and what I mean by the unspoken bond. Then, again, it leaves both free to do or not to do, as they see fit, or as they can. For instance, you saw that I enjoyed watching your trout-pool in the woods, you thought a little one here would be a pleasure to me. You worked to build the dam and put fish in to-day, all without my asking. And that alone will give me far more pleasure than if I had asked you to do it. In fact, my life here has taught me never to ask for anything. I also think that to ask for no matter what is to pay the highest possible price for it."

Vance began to see this keen-minded girl in a new light, and as a pause came, to recall how during the year he had known her she had never once asked him for even a thought. As an inevitable sequence, he felt that he had better not ask her for more now than she had promised already. She might be won, he believed. He was positive that she would not have promised friendship without both faith and trust in him, and high-souled as she was, with an almost idyllic conception of that bond, it would be far better to woo her on the same lofty plane.

"You have opened a new vision to me," he said, admiringly, after the long pause, "and one I

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shall ponder over many times. I realized that you were both keen and broad-minded the first time we discussed illusions, but you have kept beyond me ever since. A few times I have rebelled at your cool letters, and now and then called you 'Miss Iceberg' in thought. But it was all because I did not understand you. Had not followed you up to your line of thought and conduct of life. In a way, you are, if you will excuse it, one of the 'souls like stars, that dwell alone in a fellowless firmament,' to quote my favorite poem."

"'The House by the Side of the Road,' " she interrupted, smiling, "and one of my favorites, too. I recall that you quoted from it one day in the woods, and to my discomfiture as well."

"I didn't mean to do that," Vance rejoined anxiously, "only to show you the folly of pursuing 'muffled drums' in thought."

"And I accepted your dictum, didn't I?"

"I trust so, and that you will always follow the cheerful highway. But you have set me to thinking, however. Also placed a mirror before me. In it I've seen myself paying the highest price for even your company here. I asked for it."

"But that was your duty, being a man," she said. "I certainly couldn't have invited myself.

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And you knew that fact also, and that I, by custom, must wait to be asked for anything by you."

Once more Vance felt himself baffled. Try as he might, introduce any topic that he chose, even that of love, she still eluded him. Still remained the same self-controlled, yet alluring and fascinating Ollie. Just now, as she sat with face upraised and looking far over the moon's sparkling path, he saw the countenance and pensive pose of an Evangeline. Something of the same pathos was there, and as spiritually charming and heart-reaching as always. For a time Vance watched that exquisite face, then spoke.

"Ollie," he said simply, "that silvered highway is like the dream I've lived in for almost a year, and you are its moon. I tell you this because I must and not to force myself upon you. I shall leave here to-morrow, go to the woods next week, and then I shall be alone for many months. Now, can't you, won't you say there is something for me to hope for? I can work cheerfully, I can love you all the time, but I must have one ray of hope, or be wretched."

"Oh, please don't ask it—not now," she evaded with a quiver. "Please let us be just the good friends I wish, and as truthful—for now."

"And then ——?"

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“And then I—I may still be dreaming, too,” she whispered.

A little while Vance gently stroked a little dimpled hand, passive in his, and watched a pensive face still in profile.

One, two, three, four, five billows sounded their solemn monotone just below, and then that sweet sad face turned slowly toward him.

On its long lashes were glistening tears.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ocean winds ever outlining Uncle Terry's island home with white fringing spray grew colder. The few scrub-oaks amid its stunted spruce glowed crimson in the autumn haze. The flowers in Ollie's garden lay frost-nipped and prostrate, while ever and anon a scurry of brown leaves swept down the little vale to halt and float in her fish-pools. Each morning, as usual, Uncle Terry sped across to the Cape with her, then around the island to draw his pots. Each day, also, she forced herself to keep her thoughts away from the woods and on her pupils, and each noon went to a sunny nook on the point to eat and live in her own sweet dream for an hour. Each closing of school left an hour's wait for Uncle Ben's carryall and a possible letter, and about once a week one came to be hurriedly read while wave-tossed and homeward bound, and reread many times later on in sacred seclusion. Each evening, week in and week out, the same cheery fire was lit, the same solemn

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clock ticked time away, and the same ocean tolled its requiem alike to her young, hopeful outlook and to two who had none. Each evening Uncle Terry smoked, watched the fitful flames, and lived his bygone life over and over again while Aunt Lissy knit, and Ollie desperately tried to read, or to voice her sad moods in song.

Somehow, too, while she thus learned the sad lesson of love, another life kept forcing itself into her thoughts, her heart, her mood, until she heard the ring of axes and crash of falling trees. Heard them creaking and moaning from all around in the tornado blast, caught the sound of white, leaping rapids, the swish of wind-swept leaves, the hiss of driven snow and pelting sleet. Felt the icy hand of winter, the sting of bitter cold, the gloom of a dark and somber forest, and the voice of its forbidding vastness. Saw pitiful shelters of white canvas quivering in the driving snow. Saw a fitful, wind-blown fire, a mere pin-point of light in the darkness. Beheld hardy men shivering while they ate like famished savages, and then huddled in a bough-covered pit in deep snow, watching a banquet of sliced pork frying upon one tin plate. Saw those, later—one blind—staggering over deep drifts through pelting storm and merciless darkness, and felt how life and death

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forever go hand in hand through this vale of many emotions.

Another picture, a more charming one, now wove itself into Ollie's life, the home welcome of Uncle Terry's old cabin, with its cheerful open fire, its log defiance to wind and storm, and its romantic isolation. A smile, as it were, from beneath a warning wilderness, and out upon a sloping plot of greensward. She felt herself once more sheltered there, warm, dry, and secure, while a night storm raged without and bending trees grew spectral, while lightning flashed and thunder rolled. Saw also a long and narrow lake, blue-rippled in the morning sunlight. Heard the bird chorus now welcoming this bright day's arrival. Saw from a mountain-top a vast green wilderness all about, with one winding stream its only outlet to the world beyond. Many more of these wildwood charms of Uncle Terry's old home Ollie now felt and saw. The narrow, sandy shore of the lake, with canoes drawn out upon it; a rock-walled pool where curious-eyed trout watched her sharply. An alder-enclosed pond completely hidden under green lily-pads and big white odorous blossoms. A vast expanse of purple heather, glowing in the sunshine, with a vista of whitened tree-trunks and spectral branches

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to accentuate its boundless carpet of flowers. Thus did this lonely girl live over and dream of what had been an oasis in her life, with one strong man its guiding spirit.

While autumn slowly merged into winter, Ollie often sought her own little trysting-spot in the narrow vale, where the rills from two pools tinkled a tiny welcome, and purple-eyed sunfish watched her curiously, where brown leaves swept over the gray rocks and danced down to meet her, and a narrow rift of sunshine added its cheer. Best of all, there the rock walls shut out the sad monotone of the ocean. For many reasons, this wind-loved vale, this solitary dream-spot became her Mecca, and the place where she dreamed her young life-dreams again and again.

But whether here, alone, or where duty claimed her, two faces, both old and wistful-eyed, kept watching her, kept claiming her thoughts, her time, herself, as a just return for all they had done for her. This need, this duty to perform, seemed to shut the door to every dream of love and another life.

But more than all this heart-call, harder to bear than the utter loneliness and pathos of her life, the sadness of falling leaves, the ocean requiem, the white pall of snow that next hid her garden and

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turned the sofa-rock into the likeness of a winter grave, was the constant wish, the almost imperative eagerness to pour her own sad loneliness, her own gloom and longing out upon pages and pages of white paper and send this plaint to the only one who might care to read it.

Full well she knew what the answer would be. Positive was she that so to write would mean his coming to wrest her from home and her bounden duty. She knew that this would mean to think of and see for years a wrinkled face and kindly eyes with naught to cheer except the living over of bygones and hearing the sad sea waves. While feeling thus, and fighting her own heart-battle as she had done for months, there came a letter from Vance announcing his purpose to spend a Sunday at her island home.

"I have now lived my lonesome old cabin-home life here for what seems an age," he wrote, "but the end of this term is within sight. How hard it has been to keep my moods and longings to myself you will never know ; for your face, your words, your presence here, have been an abiding spirit. When I first came here, before you were on earth for me, this cabin held a unique charm, a mysterious spell of home, though silent. Here I first heard of Uncle Terry, and the pathos of his coming here, and the reason. From that moment I have felt that I was his guest. Unbidden,

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of course, yet one whom some invisible hand had led here to care for what was his and for him. When next I came, your face followed like a smiling spirit, and always since then you have shared it. It has always seemed a kind, secure, and protecting one for me. When we came here in driving snow and darkness, it soon gave us light, warmth, and comfort. When the winter tornado raged, it bade Old Boreas defiance. When spring came, its grass-plot, its porch vines, its little garden, all smiled as if you had so bidden them. From the time that you were here in reality, Uncle Terry's old cabin has become sacred to me. Here, since our bond of silence was agreed upon, you have been seemingly always present. Your face, your voice, your songs, your laughter, even your combative arguments, have each and all been like an ever-present person. When I fed the trout in the pool (as I have often done), it seemed a duty you had directed. When the vines on the porch began to crimson, I believed you also saw them and felt sad, even as I did.

"But I am soon to leave this much-loved spot, and sorrowfully, since it holds so many charming memories. So much of you. I write thus because through this old cabin I can speak my feelings to you and for you, and still keep faith with you. And I know you will understand me. Know that this cabin is uttering what I am forbidden by you to say. And what matter words, anyhow? What matter promises so long as the heart knows? What matters anything, if we understand each other and life is young? Time should only be measured by heart-throbs, even as your moods are

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measured by the ocean waves. Words may be denied me, but that doesn't matter. Your duty may deny me, but there is always a sometime. And the sometime you have promised cannot be like to-morrow for us. Cannot be like the moan of the ocean—unceasing. And so with perfect faith in our bond, I shall bring the spirit, the speech, the shining light of this cabin, home to you. And may that welcoming one be as much a beacon to you as it is to me. Even as abiding to us as the mist-hidden one upon the Promised Land that forever has and forever will be watched by loving eyes."

When Ollie read his fervid words, while bounding over the crested waves, she felt lifted into a new life, another world, a wonderland of strange, sweet thrill. An enchantment of blooming flowers, of singing birds, of summer winds, with only he and she to wander there at will. She felt that despite duty, despite years of waiting, despite all the world, no power could now change her destiny. Though vows were unspoken, she now felt herself pledged to him for life. With that yielding of her will there came to her a wonderfully sweet thrill, a quiver of heart, soul, and body.

As her thoughts came back to her own lot and duty she saw the wrinkled face and wistful eyes of Uncle Terry watching her. And that brought a mist of tears.

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The two cross-currents of her life now tossed her hither and yon. They tore at her heart-strings in the conflict between love and duty.

But more especially so when the last hour of each evening came and she, as usual, was alone with Uncle Terry and the dying fire.

"What ails ye, girlie?" he questioned tenderly a few evenings after the letter from Vance had so upset her. "Fust ye watch me like I hadn't more'n a week or two longer on arth, 'n' then ye seem in a trance. Has anything gone wrong in the woods, or is it what I've 'spected all 'long, heart trouble?" Ollie flushed guiltily, for the crisis in her life had come.

"I don't mean to act so, as you say," she faltered, "only I—I am not very happy lately."

"But he keers fer ye, don't he, and"—smiling—"I callate my girlie cares, too, so why not smile?"

For one long moment Ollie looked into the tender eyes, now watching her, the next she was in his arms and sobbing. "Oh, I feel so mean and guilty," she whispered, "but I c-can't help it. And you have been so good to me always. But I'm not going to leave you never, never, and he knows it."

Very slowly now the tall clock ticked on and on.

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Fitfully now glowed the dying embers as the sea-wind rose and fell, and more than ever did the ocean's voice sound like tolling bells to Uncle Terry as the old, old story was told again to him. Very lovingly did he stroke the head and face nestled close to his cheek, while the long past and short future of his life came to him, even as the sound of those bells. Full well he knew that this was the last of asking, and that never again would this fair girl, this "sunshine" of his home, be the same to him.

"I've known 'twar comin', girlye," he continued in the same tender tone. "Knowed it the day ye come back from the city. 'N' it's best so, 'n' your ship comin' in fer ye.

"We've had ye quite a spell, though it don't seem long, not more'n one summer," he added after another long pause. "That much we've got to think on 'n' live on, anyhow."

The last glowing coal faded to white ashes. The room grew chill. The ocean boomed louder. And then Old Age unwound the arms of Youth and Love from his neck and lifted her to her feet. Then he stooped and kissed her.

"God bless ye, girlye," he said. "God bless ye allus."

CHAPTER XXXVII

SUMMER is the beneficent smile of God, of all Nature warmed into life, love, flowers, fruit, joy, and a new existence. Winter is but the slow return to earth of all green growth, the chill to all life, the gloom of age, the sadness of death. But sometimes midway between the fulness of warmth and the depth of cold, when frost has browned, blackened, and withered all that blooms; when trees have become spectral, leaves swept away to hide and die, and when snow battles against the sun, Nature has transient moods of regret over her fell work, and sends a few kind days of mellow sunshine, like flowers to a funeral. The sky grows lambent, the sodden leaves rustle once more, there is a tinge of green smiles on sunny slopes, and the spirit of summer, its joyous wish, is with us briefly once again. Just such a respite came when Vance once more returned to Ollie's island home.

"I am in luck," he said gleefully and shaking hands with both her and Uncle Terry at once in the Cape store, "for this is like spring."

"A sorter Injun-summer tech," rejoined Uncle

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Terry, leading the way to his waiting boat, "'n' mighty comfortin' to us here. I've set my pots agin, jest to keep out-o'-doors long ez I kin," he added as they sped away, "fer nothin' to do makes time go slow."

So Vance once more stepped into Uncle Terry's simple life. He saw no change, felt none. He was, as so oft before, made welcome in cordial manner, and that was all. At supper Ollie served with the same gracious dignity, and the evening fireside was as cheery as ever. She sang her old songs at Vance's request later on, while Uncle Terry smoked, Aunt Lissy knit, the ocean boomed, and the fire glowed fitfully, as always. And yet, while Vance watched Ollie covertly when he could, told her of his life and work in the woods, her interest in him seemed to be just a trifle more cordial than usual. When his gift of live trout arrived next day by special boat and messenger, Ollie's joy was unbounded, and when the following morning came, which was Sunday, Vance was first to propose accompanying her to church.

So it went throughout these two days of outdoor and indoor life, the one with Uncle Terry, lobstering, the other with Ollie as much as possible, Vance believing that her life must some day be as his was, saw it as never before. He saw

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the "links in a chain, and all alike," as she once called all days here, just as they were. Into them, for him, was now woven a new meaning and a deeper pathos. He had read of filial devotion before, but had scant faith in it. Of a mother's deep abiding love, as more positive and natural. Of love's devotion, as inevitable, intense, and noble; yet bitterly selfish withal. But here before him was a bond of duty, a debt payment, an obligation to be fulfilled, that was like that rock-ribbed island. He had come here to woo, yet not to woo, believing he was loved, yet must not speak it except by implication. So peculiar, however, is love in sacrifice and so powerful its straw of hope, that Vance was quite content to woo in silence, and feel they were linked in thought and hope only. And so while he watched her, talked with her, felt the charm of her hospitality, the poise of her mind, he kept continually outlining his future air-castle and planning the walks in his enchanted garden. Yet ever and anon a new tenderness seemed to grace her expressive eyes, and a new joy and sunshine to raise his spirits.

Such an experience came unexpectedly to Vance the last evening of his visit, for Uncle Terry, after filling the wood-box in the old-time Sunday-evening way, retired early and then Vance smiled.

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"Did you ever read 'Popping Corn,'" he asked, "a short poem about a country bumpkin too bashful to pop the question?"

"But kept popping corn until reminded," she replied. "Yes, I recall it, and how sorry I felt for poor Susan. But why do you ask?" defiantly.

"Oh, merely the time, place, and open fire recalled it. Uncle Terry's leaving so early seemed kindly meant, only I haven't any corn to pop."

"Or questions, either, I hope, in any such mood of levity. To me the proposal should be like a prayer, and the wedding, if one follows, is a most solemn occasion. 'Until death do part' means much. All that life holds, with all its joy and sorrow and final parting, to meet and share."

"There you go again, away off on the other highway and after muffled drums," rejoined Vance, cheerfully, "and after your promises to be good and stay in Sunshine Lane. I grant that marriage is a solemn ceremony, but it's the most joyful event that comes to us mortals, and so why not be happy while you may? The sorrow and tolling bells do not need anticipation. They will come all too soon." Ollie sighed and turned away, for in her thoughts she was again taking her heart-leave of Uncle Terry. One moment only, then faced Vance again with smiling eyes.

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"I accept your caution and reminder," she answered, "and both as wisdom. But, as you once said, I must have inherited my drift of moods. And while I wish to travel on your highway, I am not always capable of doing so here."

"You ought to be, with Uncle Terry for a mentor. His optimism seems unfailing."

"But even he, born cheerful, had to leave the ocean and go to the woods to find that lost road," Ollie interrupted, "while I never escape it except for a few days. Besides I have him, or rather his fourscore years, to think about. And Aunt Lissy is failing even faster. Do you wonder I have sad moods, in my position?"

Vance glanced at her wonderingly, tenderly and understanding her lot in life as never before. He had so far seen her as a thoughtful, loving companion for these two who had cared so well for her, and as the keen, tactful, high-souled and beautiful girl she was. But now, seeing into her inner life, her moods, her needs, her obligations, her very soul, as it were, he wondered less at the reason for her mood. The longer he watched her half-averted face, the faint droop of her exquisite lips, as she sat slowly rocking, the more he wondered how she, almost admitting love for him, had yet been brave enough to put it away. To rise

above her own heart-call, as he believed, and face her sad, lonely, and desperately monotonous life here for duty's sake. Argue about it, he could not; it only gave her pain. To discuss it was no better. To plead his love and to take her away was actually to offer an utterly selfish escape, as he knew, and one that she had practically refused.

"Ollie," he said at last, "I see your life and burdens as I never have seen them before. I wish I could share them. I wish I could help you somehow. I have no one else except the Professor and Myra even to think about. And now I have plenty of money. I have also a new plan in mind that may or may not meet your approval, and that is to buy a few acres of the north point here and build a pretty cottage on it for my only two friends and myself for summer use. Of course, this all hinges on Uncle Terry's consent and yours as well. Are you willing?"

"Why, of course," she admitted blushing. "That would make my summers so much pleasanter. And," smiling, "it might open your eyes to what a morose misanthrope I am after all. To get near to people, to know them intimately, means to make them commonplace, I think."

"Well, I'll chance that part," rejoined Vance, buoyantly. "Anything, so long as I can share some

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of your burdens a few months annually. There's another thing I wish," he continued, "and that is to have you give up your school. It's a tax on your patience and nerves, and this crossing to the Cape in cold, rain and storm is folly. I worried about that all last winter. I shall now worry still more."

"But that is my only escape from sad moods," she urged. "A five-hours' forgetfulness of all loneliness. I should be miserable to give up my little band of pupils."

"Probably," admitted Vance, seeing more light, "and perhaps I am wrong in that wish. I only thought of your safety and comfort."

"It is very kind of you. But I must have at least two of the essentials for happiness, you know. And some of my pupils I really love."

Vance felt himself put aside, in a way. It seemed that the unspoken bond was all he had to anticipate for many years. He knew at this moment, as never before, how firm Ollie was in her sense of obligation. That she was tenderly disposed toward him he knew, and ready and glad to have him sojourn here all summer. Her every letter for three months had bespoken her interest in him. But—and here the pang came—no love-pleading could swerve her from her duty or take her from this island so long as Uncle Terry lived.

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The clock ticked on. The fire glowed and faded alternately with the night wind, the ocean moaned. Then Vance broke the long silence. "Sing something, Ollie," he said. "The 'Rain on the Roof' for one, and some of the old love-songs for me to recall as part of this evening."

And sing she did for a half-hour, with even more than usual feeling, while Vance kept thinking, listening, longing, as he stood beside her until the clock chimed eleven. Then she arose.

Just then at this evening's close, Vance lost his self-control.

"Ollie," he said almost desperately, and grasping her hands, "I can't keep the silence you insist on any longer. My plans, my hopes, everything, are all yours and for you. Tell me if some time, no matter when, you will come to me and share them?"

"Oh, can't you wait and trust me?" she pleaded, holding him away. "Can't you live the silent bond with faith?"

"I can, with only one word."

And then she raised her brimming eyes to his.

"And will you promise tenderness, always, always, after the illusion has gone?"

"I promise," he answered, even as the ocean spoke.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“ Oh life ! Thou and I hast been long together,
Through pleasant and through stormy weather.
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,
Perhaps 'twill cost a smile, a tear.
Then steal away ; give little warning,
But in some brighter clime bid me good-morning.”

WITH June's next return came the end of Ollie's teaching, her lonely life of duty, with all its love and devotion.

What was indeed an Event to the Cape folks came next, when all who knew her packed the little brown church to see and hear her bid farewell to girlhood and solemnly promise a new duty, a new life, a new devotion to another. Many flowers added their charm. Many glad smiles from former schoolmates illumined the occasion. A few tears from the lonely at the Cape who loved her were shed. Many more came to younger eyes, the children she had loved, and thus was added the inevitable contrast of the two highways of life. And so the two cross-currents of her life merged into one, to sweep her ever onward adown life's stream.

But when the Event was all over, when the

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Vixen, gay with many flags and brightly-clad ladies, bore Ollie away, two who had no illusions left sat and watched her pass out of their lives. Not until the misty eyes of Uncle Terry failed to see that shining boat, not until it had vanished in the shadowy distance did he speak.

"It don't seem more'n last summer since she come," he said.

"No, not that to me," Lissy quavered, looking far away over the darkening ocean, "'n' ther's not much to live fer now." Then followed a long silence between these two with only bygones left.

The last rays of the setting sun peeped under the island's dark-green canopy, then faded. The low dingle where the cottage stood grew shadowy. A few gulls that had circled clamorously around vanished one by one. The ocean's muffled roar rose louder, like a menace, as twilight fell. Not until the shadow of coming night had crept in from seaward, had hidden all but the white fringe of up-tossed spray, did Uncle Terry speak again.

"Wal, we've got a few years left, mebbe," he said, brushing his eyes and turning to the glow of sunset light. "'N' the mem'ry of what she's ben to us, anyway. Nothin' kin rob us o' that, Lissy."

